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A SHARP DOUBLE REPORT, ROSIE FELT A STINGING PAIN IN HER SHOULDER, AND THEN FELL HEADLONG TO THE EARTH.

THE LOVE THAT DIES NOT.

BY A. J. C.

[A NOVELETTE.]

COMPLETE IN THIS NUMBER.

CHAPTER I.

"**T**HAT is the man I intend marrying!"
"But, Laura, dear, do you love him?"
"Love him!" and the beautiful speaker's lips curled with scorn; "scarcely that; but I suppose love will follow. What a child you are, Rosie Lest-

range!" half angrily. "I cannot think why those foolish creatures in the convent should put such high-flown nonsense into your head!"

Rosie Lestrangle's large, dreamy, violet eyes filled with tears.

"Do not speak so, *ma cousine*!" she said, pleadingly; "the Sisters were all that is good and kind! Ah! if you had only known Sister Ursula, and seen her patience and gentleness, as I did, I am sure you would have loved her!"

The Honourable Laura Chadwick flirted her fan contemptuously.

"For goodness sake don't let anyone hear you talk such rubbish, Rosie! Lord Herbert is coming this way. I will introduce you to him."

Before Rosie could either decline or accept the proposed honour, the subject of their conversation stood before them—a tall, handsome man, with heavy, tawny moustache, and kindly, honest, grey eyes.

This was all Rosie could have told a stranger of his personal appearance; but as she glanced up at him from beneath her long, drooping lashes, she felt a nameless thrill pass through her frame, whilst the hot blood seemed to rush through her veins like liquid fire.

The whole of the ballroom and its occupants seemed enshrouded in mist, and she knew not what was passing around her.

She was aroused by the musical voice of Lord Leveson.

"I fear you are ill, Miss Lestrangle!" he

We consider this week's Novelette exceptionally good.

said, concernedly. "Mrs. Montgomery's rooms are always close and stifling."

By a powerful effort of self-control she recovered her composure sufficiently to answer him, feeling angry with herself the while for letting this strange, exciting feeling obtain the mastery, if only for a moment.

"It is nothing, Lord Leveson, I thank you," she said, quietly, forcing herself to look full into his handsome, kindly face. "A little faintness; but it has passed."

She saw her cousin's dark eyes fixed searchingly upon her as she spoke, and this added to her courage.

"I was about to ask you to confer a favour upon me when your sudden pallor wrested the words from my lips. May I ask for the next waltz, Miss Lestrangle?"

She took up her card and glanced at the names already inscribed upon it.

"I am afraid I am engaged, Lord Leveson." Not a tremor in her voice told of her disappointment.

"At least, you can spare me one?" he asked, earnestly.

She handed him her programme with a calm smile, and, with a feeling of gratification he was surprised at in himself, he inscribed his name amongst those of the "obstet of the land."

Laura Chadwick's breast was filled with avicious jealousy, but she was too much of a woman of the world not to be able to conceal it.

The hand now struck up, and, with a few words of thanks to Rosie, Herbert Leveson turned round, and offered his arm to her cousin.

Laura took it with an air of proprietorship, and glanced triumphantly at the gentle Rosie.

The latter heaved a deep sigh. "Poor fellow!" she murmured. "Little does he guess the thoughts that are flitting through Laura's brain. She will marry him, I know, because she is so clever and so beautiful; but afterwards, when he finds out that it was not for himself, but for his wealth and position, when he discovers that she was bought by the glitter of an earl's coronet in prospect, what then?"

She shuddered violently, and sinking down upon an amber-satin fauteuil, which was screened from the remainder of the room by a cluster of wavy plume-like palms, gave herself up to thought, thinking how she might save the proud and noble man from a fate which, to her, was worse than death.

Very fairylike did she look, with her petite figure enveloped in a gown of light, blush-rose satin almost covered with a mass of soft, creamy lace, and her fair face framed in by her bright golden hair.

Very fair and very beautiful! At least, so thought Sir Charles Cranston, who, with an unmistakable air of disappointment, had been wandering through the ballroom, and now, by accident, stumbled upon this sequestered spot with its enchanting occupant.

"Miss Lestrangle, it was scarcely fair or generous of you," he said in a reproachful tone, "to hide yourself in this nook whilst I have been looking everywhere for you."

She turned to him with a gentle smile. "You can hardly say you have been looking everywhere, for you did not look here, Sir Charles!"

"Fairly reasoned, by Jove! But really, Miss Lestrangle, you have shown remarkably good taste. I had no idea Mrs. Montgomery could boast of such a cosy retreat!"

He made a movement as though he would seat himself by her side; but Miss Lestrangle

did not feel in the humour for a *tit-a-tit* with the Baronet, although he was a Secretary of State, and, though still young, one of the shining lights of his party. She therefore promptly arose, and he was perforce compelled to join the other dancers.

The soothing notes of the music the *frou-frou* of the dresses, and the regular rhythm of the sliding feet had a soothing effect upon Rosie, and she was able to listen with a well-assumed interest in her partner's conversation.

Sir Charles could talk well and pleasingly when he liked, and he was now eager to appear in a favourable light to his young partner.

Although this was her first season, Rosie had already become a favourite with the men, and the cause of envy in the breast of many a matron who had a bevy of unmarried daughters. In other words she was a success, and Sir Charles was eager for her approbation.

At last the music ceased, and the dancers scattered in couples or groups through the rooms of the spacious Belgravian mansion. As Sir Charles led his partner to a seat they passed Laura and Lord Leveson.

"By Jove, don't they make a handsome couple?" cried he, in sincere admiration. "I suppose your cousin will be Lady Leveson before the season is over, Miss Lestrangle?"

Rosie's face flushed, and she felt her heart beating more violently than was its wont.

"I am sure I don't know!" she said quietly, using her fan to screen her embarrassment, which she was fearful of his noticing. "I have not heard!"

"No! I am surprised at that! Leveson's admiration and devotion has been apparent to all of us for some time now, but he was always rather a slow fellow. I remember him at Eton."

She drew herself a little further away from his side. She felt indignant that he should speak so slightly of this man, whom she had spoken to for the first time a few minutes before. Then her mood changed to one of defiance, and she boldly took up the gauntlet for the absent one.

"My father said he behaved nobly in South Africa. Lord Leveson saved his life when he was wounded at the risk of his own!"

Sir Charles glanced at her quickly, and something like a frown flitted across his brow.

"I have not the least doubt of it, Miss Lestrangle," he said, quickly. "You mistook my meaning. Lord Leveson was chivalrous, and brave to a degree. He saved three of his schoolfellows from drowning when the floods were on. But it is only when danger menaces others that he is quick. I heard your father, the Colonel, say the same thing. He was surprised by a party of six Boers or thereabouts. He was alone, but could easily have reached the camp before they got up to him. Instead of that, he stopped short, drew his sword and revolver, and fought the lot. By the time his men came to his succour half the Boers were placed *hors de combat*, and the others were preparing for flight."

"On being asked why he faced such terrible odds, his reply was characteristic. 'It is such a trouble to run, don't you know?' But, by Jove! Lord Leveson seems to be taking up all our conversation, Miss Lestrangle!"

Rosie was filled with exultation—her hero was a real hero, after all—fearless and brave. But then a little sigh escaped her full red lips. What was he to her? Nothing! Almost a stranger.

She turned to Sir Charles Cranston to make some light reply, when her partner for the next dance claimed her hand.

"And now, Miss Lestrangle, it is my dance, is it not?"

She had been sitting on a couch by the side of Miss Montgomery, the daughter of the hostess, a tall, masculine-looking young lady, with strong horsey proclivities. She looked up as the musical tones sounded in her ears.

Well did she know who the speaker was, and a feeling of pleasure took possession of her. She glanced at her programme, and read the name Herbert Leveson, written in a careless, straggling hand. Then she turned to the writer with a demure smile. She felt rather tired, and had it been anyone but him would have proposed to sit out the dance; but loyalty to herself and to her cousin forbade it.

Already she began faintly and feebly to understand the danger of this man's society. Why should she have taken such a sudden interest in him? Why was she so excited when introduced to him? The answer to even her pure and innocent mind was too, too palpable.

She scarcely heard his murmured words as they whirled round in the dizzy dance, and replied by monosyllables. She knew he was trying his utmost to please her, and almost hated him for it. The varying emotions that poured in wave after wave over her mind were so new, so strong, that she could not realise their meaning, and in fathoming their mystery her whole thoughts were engrossed.

Herbert Leveson noticed her pre-occupation, and wondered at it, but he was too gentle to allude to it either by speech or manner.

When the dance was over Rosie retired to a quiet corner, and under the plea of headache declined to dance again.

After some time Laura came up, looking proudly beautiful in her maize satin and white lace gown, which was so suited to her queenly figure, and harmonised with her cream and red complexion and her massive coils of dark brown hair.

"Are you tired, Rosie, dear?" she asked, in a gracious tone.

"My head is aching rather badly, that is all."

"I am so sorry, but these rooms are perfectly stifling! Mamma has ordered the carriage round, it will be here in a few minutes. I must go and tell Bertie we are leaving, and then I will rejoin you."

Rosie started violently. She knew who "Bertie" was, and by her cousin's manner of speaking she also knew that he had proposed, and been accepted.

A dull heavy pain seemed to strike her heart, and for a moment she felt as though she must choke for want of breath.

But she bravely combated her weakness, and when Laura returned there was no expression of anything but weariness on her fair, beautiful face.

Full of her triumph, Laura Chadwick never suspected the cause of her fair cousin's prostration.

How could a little ohit like that ever be a source of dangerous rivalry to her? Preposterous! Had anybody mooted such an idea she would have laughed in their face.

A motherless girl, who had been dragged up in a convent, to which her stern warrior father had consigned her during his term in South Africa, to be a rival to her, who, as soon as her frocks had become any appreciable length in the skirts, had been allowed to mix with the best set! Bah! people must be blind idiots to think of such a thing!

And now she was self-congratulatory over her own judgment! The girl's hoydenish graces and country looks had been a successful foil to her own superb Juno-

like form, dark features, and supercilious aim.

She would be Lady Leveson, the wife of the future Earl of Broadshire, one of the noblest peerages in the land.

She laughed to herself more than once as Lord Herbert led her to the carriage.

Sir Charles Cranston performed the same office for Rosie, but so absorbed was she in her own thoughts that she paid but little attention to his ponderous platitudes, and as he turned round on the broad steps he voted all country girls bores.

CHAPTER II.

He linked his arm within that of Lord Herbert, and the two re-entered the ball-room together.

"By-the-by, how pale and wearied that Miss Lestrange looks," said the Secretary. "Not at all like either of her cousins. Seemed vivacious enough, too, an hour ago. Women are strange creatures!"

The others did not offer to contradict this statement.

"A little brick, too!" rattled on Sir Charles, who was anxious about Leveson's vote and interest in the great division that was to take place on the following night—the greatest division of the session.

He looked up quickly, and noticed a bright sparkle in Leveson's eyes.

Sir Charles gave a chuckle.

"Something more than we know about in that," he said to himself. "Leveson is more interested than I thought. Miss Laura had best look to herself, or she will lose her coronet."

Lord Herbert tugged at his heavy moustache with an amused smile on his face.

"You were not long in finding that out, Cranston," he said laughingly. "I believe you had only one waltz together?"

"So we had, and during the whole of the time she was praising you. She seems to have kept a diary of all your achievements during the campaign."

Leveson laughed, but the blood mounted up to the roots of his curly, golden hair.

Say what you will, flattery is always pleasant, if it be administered by a careful and judicious hand.

"Very kind of her, I am sure; but her father and I were close friends. The chief is a tremendously splendid fellow, although as strict and stern as a puritan."

Cranston was watching his features with all the curiosity with which a little child examines the internal machinery of some mechanical toy. He was an ardent student of physiognomy, and burned to know if his conclusions were right.

He was not a bosom friend of Lord Leveson, and he feared the future peer might meet him with some unpleasant rebuff.

Nevertheless, curiosity for once in a way prevailed over his usual cautiousness.

"By-the-by, talking of Miss Lestrange brings me back to her cousin, the beautiful Miss Laura Chadwick. When are we to congratulate you, or is there no truth in the many rumours one hears?"

Leveson's brow became contracted, although he forced a smile to his lips.

"You must wait until to-morrow, Cranston, then I may be able to tell you something more definite. I must be off now. It is five o'clock, and I am due at Richmond at seven. We are expected at Mademoiselle Eulalie's house, near Banbury, for breakfast."

Sir Charles shook his head rather disapprovingly.

"At the invitation of the Comte de Beauveau, of course?"

"Of course!" replied Leveson, stiffly; he resented this tone of Cranston's.

"Don't let me offend you, Leveson," said the latter; "but sometimes we learn

more than outsiders. The Comte de Beauveau is useful, but is by no means to be trusted. You will speak in the House to-night?"

"A few words, no doubt. But believe me, I don't feel at all vexed. The Comte is no particular friend of mine. I simply accompany Lord Arthur."

"Miss Chadwick's brother?"

"Yes!"

With that he bade the Secretary a quiet adieu, and descended to the vestibule.

The Secretary remained buried in thought. He owned he was puzzled.

Rosie was certainly a guest at Lord Arthur's house; but he was expected in town every day.

Why, then, should Leveson interview Lord Arthur concerning his cousin? No! he could only be interviewing the young and reckless lord about Laura.

The Secretary's reasoning was acute and by a short, logical argument with himself he had arrived at something like the truth.

Lord Leveson had become entangled with Laura before he had seen Rosie, and was prepared to honourably sacrifice his feelings to his duty.

"A splendid fellow!" was the Secretary's comment; "but his sense of honour is too high. He would never make a Secretary of State! A Brutus very often plays the part of a fool!"

With this cynical philosophy still running through his mind, he turned to Clara Montgomery, and chaffingly quizzed her about her bad luck at the last race meeting.

As soon as the carriage of the Chadwicks drew up at their house in Marchester Square, Rosie alighted, and with a few smothered words of excuse to Lady Arthur—a stout, fair blonde, who might easily have been mistaken for something far lower in the social scale than a peeress—she hurried to her room.

Then summoning her maid she bade her take off her ball dress and bring her dressing-gown.

Then the maid loosened her hair, and Rosie, leaning back in her softly-cushioned chair, gave herself up to thought, ever trying to analyse the mysterious agitation which had seized her on her first introduction to Lord Herbert Leveson.

Her reverie led to nothing; for not for a single moment would she allow that she had fallen in love with this handsome, wearied-looking nobleman.

Feeling angry and dissatisfied with herself, she arose, and was about to pass into her bedroom when the door opened, and clad in a loose flowing robe de chambre of wine-coloured satin, the Honourable Laura Chadwick entered.

She clasped her cousin in her arms with affected emotion.

"Congratulate me, my darling Rosie!" she sobbed hysterically. "Lord Leveson has proposed to me, and I—I have accepted."

A feeling closely akin to loathing possessed Rosie, as she remembered the words spoken by Laura in the ballroom.

"I am very pleased if you think you will be happy together!"

"And why not?" answered Laura, sharply.

"There is not the slightest reason why you should not, if you love him and he loves you," said Rosie, simply.

Laura tossed her head disdainfully.

Then, after a pause,—

"He could have married lots of girls. Of course he could almost have had his choice with his wealth and settlements; but most of those eligible were either fair or intolerably ugly. He detests fair girls."

Rosie never made the least sign that she felt the thrust.

"I hope you will both be very, very happy!" she said, with a sincere fervency.

"Thank you, dearest. I could not sleep until I had told you about it. No one else knows a word except Ella. I have just broken it to her, and I believe she is quite jealous."

Ella was Lady Arthur, and between her and Laura there was little love lost, although they always professed the most undying affection for each other.

Rosie was awfully shocked, but she held her peace, only resolving that as soon as ever her father, the Colonel, came up to London she would ask him to let her go back with him to their sweet, quiet home in Warwickshire.

CHAPTER III.

THE next day Lord Herbert dined with the Chadwicks, and at ten o'clock the whole party drove to the House of Commons, the ladies seating themselves in the gallery.

A great and momentous debate was in progress, on the issue of which depended the fate of the Government.

This debate had been carried over three nights, and on this one the division was to be taken.

All was eagerness and anticipation, for some of the greatest orators England possessed were to speak, and amongst these was reckoned Lord Herbert Leveson, who led a party of a score or more of free and independent politicians—men who were credited with placing patriotism before party, and the welfare of their fellow-men before that of themselves.

Rosie was very eager to see "the House" on such a momentous occasion, and also, perhaps, to hear Lord Leveson's speech.

As she took her seat she was greatly disappointed.

The House was not above a quarter full, and those members present were lolling listlessly on the seat, whilst one of the members was uttering a few commonplace in a droning voice.

Then he sat down and another arose—a short, stout man, with a vast expanse of white waistcoat and a harsh, squeaking voice, not unlike the sound made by a gate swinging on rusty hinges.

"And this is the House of Commons, and these are the great legislators upon whose actions this night the world is anxiously gazing!" said Rosie, unable to control her disappointment.

"Ah, Miss Lestrange, don't be too hard upon us," said Sir Charles Cranston, who had just come up to pay his respects and bid them welcome. "It will grow more interesting presently."

"Are you going to speak, then?" asked Lady Chadwick, with a giggle, in her usual bad taste.

Sir Charles flushed. He felt her ladyship had put him in an awkward position, and he by no means thanked her for it. He feared appearing ridiculous before Rosie, although she was but a country girl.

"I may do so, Lady Chadwick," he said, in his usual suave tone; "but if I do it will only be to keep the ball rolling until Leveson is ready. Look now, Miss Lestrange!"

Rosie did look, and was astonished at the transformation that was taking place in the appearance of the magnificent chamber.

Members were rushing in by threes and fours, looking tremendously excited as they took their seats. Those who had hitherto been so sleepy and apathetic were sitting bolt upright and braining their necks forward to catch a glimpse of the front bench

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below the gangway on the ministerial side of the House.

Her heart gave a bound as she saw Leveson and Cranston enter arm-in-arm, whilst an excited cheer broke from both sides, for they each hoped that Leveson would take their view, and give them their victory.

Cranston looked grave as he took his seat near to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and whispered a few words in that gentleman's ear.

The galleries were now crowded with men in every variety of dress and uniform—dressed to do honour to the occasion—and with women whose diamonds glittered and flashed with every movement of their heads, arms, or bodies.

It was a grand and absorbing sight, and everyone seemed to feel and share in the excitement.

The flow of members never ceased, and every obtainable seat was occupied, whilst the little man with the cracked voice poured forth his wild and sweeping condemnations of the ministry.

Then he sat down, and after a faint cheer there fell upon the House a profound silence, amidst which Sir Charles Cranston, in a few well-chosen phrases, advocated the measure of the ministry. He did not speak above ten minutes, but what he did say was lucid and to the point.

When he sat down a loud cheer broke forth from his side of the House; but still the look of anxiety never disappeared from the faces of the members of the Cabinet, or from those of the chief of the Opposition.

All knew that their fate depended upon one man only, and that man was Lord Herbert Leveson.

Three or four members seated on the Opposition benches arose eager to reply to Sir Charles, but as Leveson had also risen, there were loud cries for his name.

Then a mighty and tremendous cheer broke forth, such as was only a rare occurrence in that historical chamber, and Leveson began to speak.

Rosie craned forward until her cheek touched the grille, her lips parted and her cheeks flushed with intense excitement, and once more was she doomed to disappointment.

The whole House was hushed, but the commencement of Leveson's speech did not seem to warrant the rapt attention given to it.

His sentences were loosely strung together, and his words passed his lips with a slow, halting deliberation that was almost painful to listen to. Then he slowly drew his notes from his breast pocket, and arranged them carefully before him. Still the House was in expectancy. He never raised his voice except to emphasise some false statement made by the opponents of the measure, or some crude argument in its favour made by its supporters.

So far he had done nothing remarkable; and Rosie, who did not understand the vast meaning of the change sought to be wrought in the welfare of the people, was fast losing all interest in the dry, technical details as expounded by Lord Herbert.

The latter's cheek suddenly flushed, his eyes brightened with an enthusiastic fire, and pushing aside his notes, he raised his voice and spoke with a clear and resounding intonation that took the whole assembly by storm.

"After all, what was meant by this measure? The elevation of manhood, the emancipation of a large portion of their fellow creatures. This measure was intended to be the keystone of the arch of English liberty, the first stones of which had been built up by Alfred and Edward the

Confessor. Would they refuse to let this keystone be placed in its position? Did they dare do so, and yet profess love for their fellow-men? He said emphatically no! The stone might be rough, but it must be their task to polish it and make it beautiful, but not to discard it. Once place it in the centre of the arch, and it would form a pedestal on which might be placed a statue of liberty with a torch in her hand, the light of which would penetrate to the darkest corners of the earth."

Then he sat down amidst vociferous cheers from the Ministerial benches.

The safety of the measure was assured. The Government was saved.

The ex-Prime Minister, leader of the Opposition, made a remarkably clear speech, but he could not banish the impression made by Lord Herbert Leveson.

Then the division was taken, and the Government was triumphant.

Rosie had listened intently to the impassioned oratory of Leveson, and her previous feeling had become intensified when she saw how he had triumphed; she was as one who had drunk strong drink. She was perfectly intoxicated with his success; and when, calm and unimpressible as ever, he pressed her hand, she could not suppress the words that rose to her lips,—

"Lord Leveson, I am so glad! so very glad! What a brave and noble man you are!"

He smiled faintly, and hastened away.

Had that speech not been delivered, he might, in the not distant future, have been Prime Minister himself; but he never for a moment regretted the loss; he relinquished the golden prize without a pang for his sense of duty. But it was the other prize—the fair girl whose admiration for him he could not fail to perceive—that he regretted being lost; this guerdon also, his duty had demanded of him, and he had given it up, but not so easily or so willingly as the other.

A few days later the engagement was publicly circulated, and the Chadwicks left town for Highcourt.

Rosie, with her father, retired to their little nest in Warwick, and in the cosy, old-fashioned rooms of the "Hermitage" she tried to forget Herbert Leveson.

This was no easy task. She was ever picturing him to herself—at one time on the battlefield, boldly defying a party of howling Boers; at another, winning a nation's gratitude by his fervent and patriotic eloquence.

The Colonel, busily engaged in writing a heavy and ponderous book that was to completely revolutionise the tactics of modern warfare, never noticed her preoccupation.

And so the days wore on. And as the green of the woods and plantation became gradually harmonious, symphonies in brown, olive, and yellow, she grew paler and thinner, and her beauty became etherealised and saintlike—a Marguerite without a Faust, a Hero without a Leander.

She moved about the house with the same airy grace as formerly; but there was a listlessness in her steps, and an absence of the usual merry smile on her lips, that would have been noticed by anyone less pre-occupied than the ardent soldier.

One morning she was seated in the breakfast room, gazing absently out across the lawn towards a fir-tree plantation, in which the rooks were making a greater din than usual.

Very delicate and childlike did she look in her morning robe of pale blue cashmere, with its close-fitting band of the fur of the silver fox, the wide sleeves, edged with the same fur, falling back and disclosing her white superbly rounded arms. But there was a sad pensive expression in the liquid

depths of her large, lustrous, violet eyes, which would have told an ordinary onlooker that her thoughts were far, far away from the scene stretched before her.

She was aroused from her reverie by the entrance of her father.

"Rosie, my child," he said, with gentle intonation in his voice. "I have invited a few visitors for some shooting. They will be here next Monday. I know you will make them welcome and comfortable."

"Of course I will, papa. Who are they?"

"Well, let me see, there are the Chadwicks, Lord Arthur, his wife and Laura, Captain Gascoigne, Cranston, and Lord Herbert Leveson."

"Lord Leveson!" she repeated, slowly, the blood suffusing her face and neck.

"Of course! We could not ask the Chadwicks without him."

"Of course not," she said, absently.

Then she went up to her father, threw her arms around his neck, and, laying her fairlike head upon his broad chest, burst into a flood of tears.

The Colonel was distracted. Stern disciplinarian and martinet as he was, he was as tender-hearted as a child.

"My love! my darling! What is it?" he cried, anxiously. "Are you ill or in trouble? I have been so occupied I have not had time to notice," he continued, in an apologetic tone. "But really, you look paler and thinner than usual. What is it, my pet?"

"Nothing, nothing! I think I have been rather too lazy lately, and so got out of sorts. It is nothing, papa, believe me, it is nothing. A good sharp walk will make me all right."

With that she hastily left the room, and in future, whenever she was in her father's presence, succeeded in appearing cheerful and gay.

CHAPTER IV.

THE Tuesday following Rosie took a longer walk than usual, for it was the day on which the guests were to arrive, and she was schooling herself to meet them without showing any of her embarrassment.

So absorbed was she that she had walked several miles before she noticed whither she was going.

Upon arousing herself she found that she was five or six miles from the Hermitage, and in the most lonely and desolate part of the high road.

As she looked up she shuddered. On her left was a dark, dismal wood, which grew on the side of a steep slope; whilst on the right was a still, dark mere.

It was an uncanny spot, and near where several murders of the most atrocious description had been perpetrated.

She turned round quickly to retrieve her steps and found herself confronted by two villainous-looking tramps.

Her heart beat wildly and she stood perfectly still, quite uncertain what course to pursue.

There was not another living being in sight, and she knew the nearest habitation was at least half-a-mile distant.

Under these circumstances she determined to face the men boldly, and carrying out this resolution, attempted to pass them. The men, however, barred her way determinedly.

"Assist two poor workin' men, miss, an 'asn't eaten a crust o' bread for three days," said one, with a professional whine.

Thinking to conciliate them she drew out her purse and tendered him a shilling. The other gave a low ominous growl.

"'Taint half enuff; gi' us yer purse, you can get more, we can't. Ye're no better'n us; ye're on'y flesh and blood, though yer

has got a purty painted face. Gi' us it all, I tell yer!"

Rosie drew herself proudly up: at that moment she felt herself every inch a soldier's daughter.

"How dare you be so insolent?" she exclaimed. "You shall get nothing more, nothing whatever. Let me pass or it will be worse for both of you!"

The wretches laughed in her face.

"Yer'll gi' us those 'er bracelets, and that chain, and yer watch, and hennything yer 'as wallyable now!" said the man with a ferocious oath, as he seized her roughly by the wrist and grabbed her purse.

"Help! Help! Help!" shrieked Rosie, now in the utmost fear.

"Put yer hand o'er her trap, Bill, an' just gi' her a knock on the 'ed if she gi's any more jaw."

Rosie struggled violently, and the second ruffian aimed a ferocious blow at her face. It missed its mark, but hit her on the ear, and she fell violently to the ground.

At that moment the crashing of twigs was heard, and a tall, gallant figure sprang into the rout. There was a quick succession of heavy blows, a few muttered oaths, and one of the miscreants lay stretched upon the ground, his eyes closed, and his face besmeared with blood, whilst the other ran down the road at the top of his speed.

As she slowly opened her eyes, Rosie saw Lord Herbert leaning over her. A vivid flush mantled her brow as he assisted her to rise.

"I trust you are not much hurt, Miss Lestranger?" he said tenderly.

"No, not at all. The merest trifle."

But as she spoke a deathlike pallor spread over her face. She recoiled, and would have fallen had not Herbert caught her in his arms. As he held her soft, clinging form against his broad chest, and glanced down at her pale, beautiful face, a strange longing to possess this fair creature as his own seized him.

For a moment Laura, with all her queenly grace, was forgotten, and he felt that in his arms lay his life's happiness. He stooped down until his moustache brushed her placid brow, and his breath stirred the tiny little ringlets on her temple.

Then he paused. His high sense of honour came to his aid. No; if it cost him his life or more than this pure and innocent creature should not know other than honour and respect from him.

Rosie slowly opened her eyes, and her gaze met his. In that one long, rapturous glance the secret of both was disclosed. They knew that each loved the other passionately, fondly, devotedly, and yet that there was a barrier between them which neither could overleap—a gulf that could not be bridged over. Honour—a priceless jewel to both—made their secret love a heavy and wearisome load.

She gently averted her head from his ardent gaze, and disengaged herself from his strong embrace. A violent shudder agitated her frame. Then she impulsively held out her small, neatly-gloved hand.

"Lord Leveson," she said, gently, although every note trembled with agitation, "I can never forget this day. How nobly you acted!"

He took her hand in one of his, and laid the other upon the top of it. His lips parted, but no sound came from them. A thick lump in his throat seemed to be about to choke him. With a woman's tact, Rosie came to the rescue. To see this strong man's distress was terrible to her.

"What are we to do about this poor man?" she asked. "You will not hand him over to the police? Distress drove him, perhaps, to act as he did."

Her sweet forgiveness of the one who

would have taken her life—intensified Herbert's admiration for her.

She cast a look of pity upon the poor wretched tramp, who had assumed a half-sitting posture, and was casting rueful glances at the handsome pair, as he wiped his face with a tattered rag of a handkerchief.

"You do hit 'ard, cap'n!" he said, "but it serves me right. Howsomever, I s'pose it'll be ten years for me."

He gave a weary groan and hung down his head.

The man had not tasted anything but a hard crust, squeezed from tight-fisted charity, for a week or more.

"Tell him he shall be free," said Rosie, eagerly. "Do not be hard on him, for my sake."

"For your sake," with a weary sigh, "I would do anything almost."

The last word came out with a gasping, choking sob, as though it was tearing out his very heartstrings to utter it.

Stooping over the man he placed a sovereign in his hand, accompanied by a card.

"If you want to be an honest man once again, go to that address in London; two days hence I will be there," he whispered.

The man was too much taken aback to reply. He gazed at the card, then at the coin, and then at the speaker, in dumb-founded amazement; then he looked towards Rosie, and all was explained.

At that very moment he could have fallen at her feet and worshipped her. Rosie was his salvation. Bill Symes was from that very moment a changed man.

Never for one moment could he cease to recollect the sweet, pure being who had saved him from ignominy and despair.

CHAPTER V.

COLONEL LESTRANGE was more than astonished at his daughter's absence. The hours slipped away, and she was not there to receive the guests, who might be expected at any moment.

Stern disciplinarian as he was, he could not understand her strange neglect of duty. That his daughter should forget herself so far was beyond his comprehension.

Then another idea seized him, and caused his heart to almost cease beating. What if something had happened to her?

He paced feverishly up and down the room in a frenzy of despair, and was about to send all the servants out in search of her, when the noise of wheels was heard, then came loud laughing and talking in the hall, and he knew his guests had arrived.

He was beside himself with mortification and chagrin at his daughter's absence, but met his guests with a cheerful, easy grace, that effectually reversed his inner feelings.

Laura and Lady Arthur were the first to greet him; Laura with a proud air of unruffled grace, her sister-in-law with affectionate gush. Then came Lord Arthur and Captain Gascoigne looking rather blasé in the ruddy light of the autumn afternoon.

Sir Charles Cranston brought up the rear, glancing around with an air of easy nonchalance, as he divested himself of his heavy fur-lined cloak.

"But where is my old comrade, Leveson?" asked the Colonel, in some surprise.

"The very question I was going to put about Rosie," said Lady Arthur, with a laugh which, although it exhibited to view two rows of dazzling white teeth, distended her mouth to an immoderate width.

Laura looked almost as annoyed as her host, whose brow darkened at what he deemed an ill-natured remark.

"Bertie said he knew a short cut, uncle, and preferred to walk. He is certain to be here presently."

The Colonel looked gratefully towards her, but still he knew not his way out of the dilemma. What was he to do with the lady guests? He could scarcely hand them over *holus bolus* to the housekeeper.

"Rosie has behaved very badly, I am afraid," he said at last, plunging in *medias res*. "She went out into the plantation three or four hours ago and has not returned. Perhaps she has gone to meet you?"

"And met Lord Herbert instead!" whispered Lord Arthur in his wife's ear, with a grin.

The latter giggled out aloud.

Colonel Lestranger eyed her sternly.

"Your ladyship appears amused," he said stilly. "I am glad to see that an old man's company is not too tiresome."

"Not at all, you dear old nunkey," said Lady Arthur, throwing her fat, rounded arms round his neck, and pressing her ear-mimed cheek against his.

Colonel Lestranger hated to be called by such pet names as "nunkey," but this was nothing to Ella. She tramped upon people's feelings with as little compunction as she would on the pattern of the carpet.

A strange restraint fell upon the group, and stern silence reigned supreme as they munched their biscuits and sipped their sherry.

Cranston tried to enter upon a political discussion with the Colonel, but totally failed, the latter only answering in monosyllables.

Then Gascoigne asked him what he thought of the winner of the Lincoln.

"The best horse in training at the time without a doubt."

Gascoigne collapsed.

There was no arguing with an old fogey like this.

"Bad as the army and navy," he whispered in Lord Arthur's ear.

The latter gave a loud guffaw.

"You're three ranks below him, but the old fellow is as rich as Cresces, and I want a couple of thou. badly."

Gascoigne nodded.

Just then Ella uttered a little shout of merriment and held up both her hands.

"Well, I declare! Nunkey! Look here; both our lost sheep together. What's that rhyme, something about the tails coming home and leaving the sheep in the fold of the good shepherd? Very peculiar, is it not, to think that dirty, mud-be-dragged sheep are pretty? For myself—"

Here her lord and master gave her a vigorous pinch on the arm.

"Ella, what are you thinking of?" he said. "If you go on at this rate he'll never do it."

"Pawn my jewels, then," retorted Lady Arthur. "I'd just as lief have paste, and nobody knows the difference. Don't worry!"

Lord Arthur was the very last one in the world to worry. Since his majority he had been "going the pace," and, like many more, he intended to die game. Nobody should ever see him disport the white feather!

"All right, Ella, only don't ruffle the old boy's feathers too much. I shouldn't like to vex him."

Whilst they were engaged in this discussion the rest of the party, including Laura, were gazing down the long, straight avenue, up which Lord Leveson and Rosie were coming, the latter's garments dust-stained and splashed with mud.

All were in astonishment. By Rosie's pale face they knew that something serious had happened.

"Quite a Sir Galahad, your *fiancé*, my dear Laura," whispered Lady Arthur.

Laura drew herself up with dignity.

"You forget, Ella," she said, "that Rosie is your relative as well as mine."

"Only by marriage, dear."

The whole party rushed out on the terrace to meet the "stray sheep," as Lady Ella persisted in calling them.

After a few words of quiet welcome Rosie retired, and then Lord Herbert told the story of the afternoon's adventure, Laura keeping her eyes fixed and steady upon his face as he spoke.

The Colonel listened intently, the fiery flash of his eyes showing that the spirit of the old soldier was in nowise subdued.

"And you gave the fellow in charge?" he asked, as Lord Herbert paused.

For the first time Laura saw his face change colour.

"Well, sir, no, I did not."

"What?"

"At Miss LeStrange's earnest entreaty I let him go. She said she believed he had been driven to the crime by starvation, and I believed the same myself."

The veins on the Colonel's forehead stood out in strong relief, whilst his face turned purple with rage.

For a moment it seemed as though there would be an explosion. At last the Colonel's sense of hospitality came to his aid.

"You acted upon your own discretion, Leveson," he said, coldly, "but I think you did wrong."

"So do I," said Laura, with a freezing look.

"I should have liked the fellow kept, if only as a witness to my preserver's heroism," said Lady Ella, with a loud laugh.

"I quite agree with Leveson," said her spouse. "I dare lay five to two in ponies that the fellow turns out a good—what d'ye call it? I mean a fellow that earns regular wages, and—er—votes straight, don't you know?"

"I'd have shot the beggar!" said Gascoigne. "They're always after the game, and rob a fellow of his rights and his sport."

Leveson looked annoyed, and Sir Charles, who had his own reason for wishing to make the brilliant nobleman his friend, stopped diplomatically into the breach.

"I think you were quite right, Leveson. A man who has once been in serious danger thinks twice before he runs the same risk again. This man, I will be bound, will be steady and sober as any in the future."

Further argument on the point was cut short by the entrance of Rosie, who was clad in a long French grey robe of some soft clinging material that showed every line and undulation of her well rounded form.

At her throat was a small bow of cerise satin, secured by a diamond crescent, and round her wrists she wore a couple of heavy bracelets of dead gold.

Plain though her attire, she wore with it such a pretty air of sweet simplicity that it seemed as though any richer garb would have been misplaced.

As her delicately white taper fingers, with their pink nails, moved deftly about the Dresden china tea-cups, and were reflected with increased brilliancy from the bright silver, Lord Leveson gave a deep sigh. He saw he had made a mistake, and for life.

Rosie wore an air of subdued sadness, which had become habitual to her since her return from London; but which the jealous Laura ascribed to some tender passages which she was certain had taken place between her and Leveson.

"Our marriage must be hastened," she said to herself, as she slowly sipped her

tea, whilst admiring the pure water of the gems of the engagement ring given her by Leveson.

The shooting party at the Hermitage could not be called an absolute success. The bag of game each day was splendid, but beyond that the whole affair was wearisome in the extreme.

The Colonel was hospitable enough in his own stately way; but long residence in foreign lands had made him unused to the ordinary usages of society, and he seemed cold and formal.

Rosie was distrustful and nervous from the newly-formed but hopeless passion that agitated her virgin heart.

Laura was jealous and watchful, and the men were thoroughly wearied of the rude jokes and innuendoes of Lady Arthur Chadwick.

The latter would have liked to accompany the sportsmen each day; but so far the others had resisted her fancy.

At last, one fine mild October morning she had her way.

A rendezvous was appointed, and the servants ordered to spread the luncheon on a grassy slope at the side of a small stream—a tiny tributary of the Avon—which flowed through the estate.

"This is what I call jolly!" said Lady Arthur, as she rushed into the dining-room in a tweed costume of most striking pattern, a hard felt hat surmounted with a couple of gulls' wings on her fair, fluffy hair. "Why should men have all the sport. I should like to know. *Vive les Amazons!*"

Rosie and Laura, both clad in closely-fitting dark green cloth costumes, with toques of the same-coloured velvet, smiled at her enthusiasm.

"You should have been a man, Ella!" said Laura, in her usual cool tones.

Lady Arthur laughed loudly at the questionable compliment.

"Don't I wish I was!" she said, passing her fingers through her fluffy curls. "All you girls would be madly in love with me."

Laura laughed again; but Rosie busied herself in drawing on her tan *saddles* that her guest might not notice the disgust which she was certain must be apparent in her face.

"Shall we start?" she asked quietly.

"I have been waiting this half-hour," said Ella, viciously slapping the skirts of her gown with the short, gold-headed cane she carried in her hand.

The three then started for the rivulet, chatting gaily as they went along.

When they reached the slope they found the servants busily engaged in unpacking the hampers, but there was no sign of the sportsmen.

"I knew we should be too early, Ella," said her sister-in-law. "You are always so impetuous. We are half-an-hour before our time."

"Hark!" said Ella. "I can hear shots. They must be over in that gorge!"

"They are not; they are in the coppice," said Laura. "I heard the shot distinctly."

"I am certain they are in the gorge. I know the sound of a shot too well to be deceived. What do you say, Rosie?"

"I did not hear it distinctly enough to be certain; but I thought the sound came from the plantation."

"Well, I tell you what we'll do," said Lady Chadwick, who, in addition to her other accomplishments, possessed a perfect knowledge of the slang terms and parlance of the betting-ring, "we'll have a sweep-stake!"

"A what?" cried Laura, her lips curling.

"A sweepstake, my dear," said Lady Chadwick, good-humouredly. "You say they are in the coppice; I say the gorge, and Miss LeStrange says the plantation."

"I said I thought—"

"Just the same, my child. We each back our opinion for a sovereign, and whoever finds them takes the three. Let us put them down in this hollow. Williams will see they are all right. Come on, what are you afraid of?"

After some little persuasion on the part of her ladyship they agreed, Rosie because the others were her guests, Laura because she thought she might degrade Rosie in the eyes of Lord Herbert, by telling him this gambling was her proposal, and Lady Arthur because she was delighted in anything that gave a little unnatural excitement. The money was thrown down in the hollow, and the three parted.

Laura set off at a brisk walk for the coppice, Lady Arthur, in spite of her skirts, ran towards the gorge, while Rosie, feeling merrier than she had done for some time—the effects of the bright sunshine and the brisk walk from the Hermitage—stopped blithely along the narrow path that led by the side of the winding stream, which at last lost itself in the plantation.

As she went along she was certain she heard several shots, and she increased her pace, laughing merrily. Gambling is contagious, and certainly the contagion seemed to have seized her.

"I shall win. My very first bet, and I shall win. I can hear them talking!" she cried, excitedly. So, gathering her draperies closely round her, she dashed into the plantation.

Presently she came to a steep path that led down into a little grassy hollow, on the other side of which was a thick heavy undergrowth of ferns, above which rose the slender stems of young saplings.

Amidst these ferns she could hear the words of talking, mingled with hearty laughter, whilst down in the hollow was young Lord Herbert and the Colonel.

She called out to them as she prepared to descend the steep path, the winding of which would shortly conceal her from their view.

They turned, and then, with a few words to the Colonel, Lord Herbert, gun in hand, bounded up the slope.

"My dear Miss LeStrange, this is a surprise, and a pleasant one. We did not expect you for another half-hour, at least."

She laughed merrily, all her former gay spirits seemed to have returned on this eventful day.

"You did not think, then, we were such good walkers?" she said.

He looked at her with fond sadness. She seemed prettier than ever in her dark, close-fitting gown, and he felt that he would have willingly given away nine-tenths of his life to have her with him always for the remaining tenth.

He looked so longingly and ardently at her that, to hide her embarrassment, she turned aside her face.

At that moment a small convoy arose almost from beneath their feet, and she caught the gleam of two barrels from out the ferns of the opposite slope pointed directly at Lord Herbert. Quick as thought, she sprang between him and them.

There was a sharp double report, she felt a stinging pain in her shoulder, and then fell headlong to the earth.

Everything had happened so quickly that it was not until he saw her lying at his feet, her gown stained with her crimson blood, that Lord Herbert realised the noble self-devotion of this gentle maiden.

He knelt down and tried to staunch the flow of blood from her shoulder with his handkerchief.

"Oh, Heaven! she has sacrificed herself for me," he cried, his face quivering with agony.

CHAPTER VI.

"Do you think he will recover, doctor? Tell me the truth. To know the worst is even better than this suspense."

The speaker was Rosie LeStrange, who, clad in a loose robe of pale blue and white satin, reclined on a luxurious couch in her dressing-room.

She looked very pale and careworn, and her lips trembled as she raised her large round eyes pleadingly to the doctor's face. Her left arm was in a sling, and a violent spasm of pain shook her slender frame as she turned partly round in her eagerness.

Dr. Ferrier looked at her with kindly gravity and a reproving shake of the head.

"What did I tell you young lady? If you persist in exciting yourself and moving about so restlessly your bandages will become disarranged and the consequences may be serious—very serious."

"But my father, what of him? Do tell me, doctor, I beg of you."

"Well, my dear, the shock to his nerves has been great, very great indeed, and I can give you no positive assurance that he will recover. His constitution has suffered woefully from the climate."

Rosie groaned and covered her face with her disengaged hand.

"He is dying and I killed him! My poor, dear, kind-hearted father!"

Dr. Ferrier remained by her side for nearly an hour striving to comfort her; but the only word that would have conveyed comfort to her he could not utter.

He knew from the very moment that he was called in to attend father and daughter, three weeks before, that the Colonel's life was sped.

On hearing the cries of Lord Herbert, Colonel LeStrange had rushed up the rugged slope, and when he saw his daughter lying, as he believed, lifeless at his feet, he gave one short gasp, and fell down stricken with paralysis.

Where he fell the turf was thin and wet and slippery, and he rolled down to the bottom of the dell.

Since that time he had neither spoken nor opened his eyes, and it was only by listening to his faint breathing that the doctor could tell for a certainty he lived.

Whilst Rosie was in a critical condition, Dr. Ferrier had kept back from her the peril in which her father stood, but now that she was approaching convalescence he felt no longer justified in doing so.

Leveson's state of mind may be easily imagined. To a sensitive nature like his the catastrophe that had befallen the LeStranges was terrible. He accused himself of being the murderer of both father and daughter until he heard Rosie was certain to recover but even then the agony he suffered was beyond description.

His friends said his sensitiveness had generated into morbidness, and shook their heads gravely as they reminded one another that the family of the Levesons was not entirely free of hereditary lunacy. A remote ancestor, the present Earl of Broadshire's great great-grandmother, had been of most eccentric habits.

Of course, the shooting-party at the Hermitage was entirely broken up, neither Gascoigne nor Lord Arthur Chadwick being exactly the most suitable guests in a house of sickness.

Laura had offered in her cold, icy manner, to remain, but the offer was made with such ill-grace that Rosie could not bring herself to accept it.

And so she was alone in the lonely, empty house, with her dying father, and unable even to go to his bedside to soothe his dying moments.

Letters and telegrams flowed in by shoals, but written sympathies are poor comfort,

and as Rosie could not answer them herself, they seemed more cold and comfortless than usual.

Every day either Lord Herbert's valet or squire, whom the nobleman had taken into his own service, came to make inquiries and take back a report.

Rosie understood thoroughly the feeling that actuated his lordship in showing such pressing solicitude, but now and then she could not refrain from asking herself why he did not come himself.

She knew exactly why he did not, and respected him for it, although at times felt herself longing to behold him once again and to confide in him all her troubles.

And so the days wore on, and at last, as the stately trees of the park were divesting themselves of their gorgeously-coloured foliage and preparing for the stern struggle of winter, Rosie was able to leave her couch and visit the bedside of her father.

She was just in time to see the old soldier open his eyes for the first time.

He looked longingly into her pure, spirituous face and gave a great sigh.

"Heaven help my darling, and bless her!" he murmured. "Kiss me, dear one."

And as her warm lips pressed his cold and bloodless ones his whole frame quivered, and he sank back with a short gasp and a sad smile.

Rosie stood by his side for several minutes before she could believe the truth—that he was dead, and she was an orphan!

Still grasping his hand in hers, she sank back into a chair looking aimlessly before her. Her world was now an entire blank, and she vaguely wondered to herself why she was alive. Everything seemed to be strangely ordered, and she felt puzzled.

When Dr. Ferrier saw the state into which she had fallen he felt that he had acted wrongly in having admitted her to the sick chamber of her father at all. He feared that this tearless, inconsolable grief might end in something worse even than death—that it might end in madness!

And for the first day or two it seemed very probable that such would be the case. Her lonely grief had entirely overwhelmed her, and all her energy and spirit appeared to have entirely deserted her. What had she to live for? Was it not better that she should die and rid the world of a useless encumbrance?

When the many guests arrived at the "Hermitage" to bid their last farewell to all that remained upon earth of one of the bravest and most heroic of the leaders of the British soldiers who have made their name a *res gestæ* for all that is valorous and fearless throughout the world, she went through the usual formalities prescribed by the rigorous, unwritten laws of society with a strange far-away look in her eyes that all noticed but few could describe. Amongst the guests were many old companions-in-arms of the deceased Colonel; but as yet Lord Herbert Leveson had not made his appearance.

She wondered vaguely at his absence, but could scarcely have put her wonderment in words. She missed something, but what that something was she could not have told had she been asked.

On the morning of the funeral, Lord Herbert looking but a shadow of his former self, came to the "Hermitage."

Rosie rose from her seat to meet him: then a flood of tears rushed to her eyes, and she fell down upon a couch and wept and sobbed as though her heart would break. Dr. Ferrier, who was present, murmured a prayer of thankfulness. He knew that those tears, those blessed tears, had re-

deemed her life; their moisture he full well knew, would thaw the icy grip of the grim skeleton, and Rosie would live.

Would live for what? Live to be a burden to herself? Had he known and fully realized the secret workings of her heart he would have hesitated ere he had felt so jubilant over the certainty of her recovery. But he did not, and perhaps there was not one in that room who did.

CHAPTER VII.

AND now the preparations for the marriage of the Honourable Laura Chadwick with Lord Herbert Leveson were pushed on apace. Rosie LeStrange heard of them, but was so buried in her silent grief that she paid but little attention. She was now one of the most wealthy women in England, and at the same time the most unhappy.

It was two days before the wedding, and she was seated in a large verandah chair on the lawn in front of the "Hermitage." The night was somewhat chilly, and she had enveloped her head and shoulders in a large crimson silk burnous, which formed a striking contrast to her dead-white satin gown with its black bows.

With her head leaning upon her small, snow-white hand she gazed long and earnestly in the direction of the plantation, thinking—thinking of that meeting with Lord Herbert, which had so tragical an ending.

She was aroused from her reverie by a voice whispering her name softly in her ear.

She gave a violent start, and turned towards the intruder.

It was Herbert Leveson. But how changed, how sadly changed! He was scarcely recognizable. His cheeks were sunken and had lost their colour. His eyes were dull, and his whole frame looked shrunken and shattered.

"You here!" she cried, in dismay. "Why, oh! why have you come?"

He seized her hand in both his, and, pressing his lips to it, with one long, passionate kiss, fell upon his knees at her feet.

"Save me! save me!" he cried, hoarsely, his voice quivering with suppressed passion. "Rosie, do not, I beseech you, condemn me to this life-long misery? Have pity upon me! You are the only one I ever loved. With you for my own I should be the happiest man in England. Without you, life will be an everlasting curse. I have tried hard to combat this, but I cannot—I am vanquished."

She arose to her feet and looked down upon him, with a strange, yearning light in her eyes.

"Lord Leveson," she said, slowly, and with considerable difficulty, "this is madness! You are to be married the day after to-morrow. I know you would not insult me, but had I not faith in your honour, what must I think of this?"

He still retained his grasp of her hand.

"Rosie!" he cried, vehemently, "you know I love you—love you as never woman was loved before. Why then condemn me to marry another? I have been wrong, very wrong, I admit. I made a mistake. At the time I knew not what love meant. You taught me. Yes, Rosie, you were the first and only one whom I ever loved. Why should that phantom, that creation of the imagination—honour—separate us? Why should it condemn me to a life-long misery? Is it not dishonourable for me to wed one I love not?"

She drew her hand gently from him, whilst her bosom rose and fell tumultuously.

"Lord Leveson," she said, "this is unworthy of both you and me. Heaven only

knows your love for me cannot exceed that I bear you, but were your honour ever to be sullied, I should despise both you and myself. We have been, perhaps, unfortunate, but there are higher aims in this world than personal happiness and comfort. You, Lord Leveson, have a great and noble career before you. Your countrymen demand your services, and your honour belongs to them as well as yourself. As for me, I shall ever watch your progress to the zenith of fame with a feeling of pride and admiration. Should you ever require assistance that I, in my humble way can render, it is yours. But in return I must ask you, as a just and merciful man, never let us meet again. This present moment of madness will pass, and then you will see the path honour bids you take. Obey its mandate, and I shall be well pleased. Farewell, and may Heaven bless and guide you."

Stooping down, she pressed her pale lips to his hot, feverish brow, and then turned and fled.

Leveson remained on the ground completely stunned.

Everything seemed to swim around him, and he was thoroughly incapable of motion. The minutes flew by and became hours, but still he remained on the same spot.

His senses seemed to have left him, and the only feeling he had was a sense of burning upon that spot, which had been pressed by Rosie's lips.

The night became colder and the dew descended like small rain.

A violent shudder agitated his stalwart frame, and he arose.

"She is all right! She is noble!" he murmured, as he moved away. "My honour must remain unsullied, if only for her sake."

When he stepped in front of the little booking-office of the country station, and called for a first-class ticket to London, the clerk looked at him half inquisitively, half commiserating.

"A splendid looking man, but one who has seen a world of trouble," was his comment as he stamped the ticket.

On arriving at St. Pancras station, Leveson hailed a hansom cab and was driven to his chambers in Pall-mall.

On the very threshold he was met by Lord Arthur Chadwick. He would have pushed by the insignificant-looking peer had he not been detained by the latter, who seized him hastily by the arm.

"Leveson, I must speak with you," he said, with an unwonted tremor in his voice.

Leveson turned abruptly round in surprise. For a moment he thought Lord Arthur had been indulging too freely in the cup that cheers and inebriates; but on looking at him more closely he saw that he was mistaken. Chadwick's face was pale and haggard, whilst his eyes seemed almost standing out of his head. Leveson hastily dragged him into his room, and forced him into a chair.

"What is the matter? What has happened?"

Chadwick buried his face in his hands, rocked himself to and fro. At last he aroused himself and seized Leveson by the hand.

"Do not blame me. I knew nothing of it. I could never have suspected it," he said, incoherently.

"I blame you for nothing, Chadwick, because I know nothing. What is it, man? For Heaven's sake, speak out!"

"Laura has gone!"

"Gone! Dead?"

"Would to Heaven she was! Worse than that."

Herbert Leveson staggered back as

though he had received a cut across the face with a riding-whip. He knew too well the meaning of the words spoke by the other. And this was the woman to whom he was about to give his name—a name which for many centuries had never been stained by dishonour! This was the woman for whom he was about to sacrifice the whole of his future happiness! The blow was terrible!

He glanced at Lord Arthur Chadwick with a stern look of reproach.

"Don't look like that, Leveson. She has disgraced my name as well."

The young lord seemed thoroughly overwhelmed by his humiliated position. Plunging his hand desperately into his breast pocket, he drew out a delicate perfumed note.

"It is for you," he said, hoarsely.

Leveson crushed it up, and was about to consign it unread to the flames, when his arm was arrested by his companion's feverish clutch.

"We know nothing! For Heaven's sake read it, that I may know the worst."

Leveson tore it open and read as follows:—

"DEAR HERBERT—I am about to confer upon you a very great favour. I am going to place your wife's future coronet again at your disposal, when no doubt my cousin, Rosie Lestrangle, will be only too glad to be the recipient of your favours. I find after all that marriage without love is a very tame affair. I never loved you, but my ambition prompted me to try and win you. I succeeded, but found no pleasure in success, for I knew from the first you loved another. You are now free to make her your wife, as I was married this evening to the Comte de Beauveaux. We start for Brussels to-night, and probably many years will elapse ere I again see England. Hoping you will be as happy as I am at present, I remain, dear Herbert, ever your faithful friend,—

"LAURA DE BEAUVEAUX."

"Tell my brother we were married at the French Consulate, and that he need not trouble himself any further about his sister."

When Leveson had finished reading, Lord Arthur gave a sigh of relief.

"Thank Heaven it is not quite so bad as I feared," he said, with a shudder, "although it is bad enough for Laura to have married an adventurer. I tremble when I think of her future."

Leveson did not reply. He was thinking of the Hermitage and its lovely occupant. He was free. A feeling of joy thrilled his whole being, for now nothing could stand between Rosie Lestrangle and himself.

He comforted Chadwick as best he might, and walked with him part of the way home; and then, upon retiring to his chambers, went to his desk, and wrote a long, long letter to Rosie.

* * * * *

Six months later Rosie and Herbert were married at the simple little church in the Warwickshire hamlet.

The country people came to witness the ceremony from all the little villages for miles around, and the path from the church to the gates of the Hermitage was several inches thick with flowers, the humble offerings of humble admirers.

The bride's spiritual beauty was the topic upon every lip, and as they were seated in the carriage on their way to the station from whence they were to take the train to Lord Leveson's seat, the brilliant young statesman drew her closely to him, and their lips met in one long, passionate communion.

"And this is love!" murmured Rosie, nestling closer to his side.

"My darling," he replied, "this is 'The Love that Dies not!'"

[THE END.]

Call the attention of
your dear friend to the
stirring romance

UNSEEN FIRES

IVY'S PERIL.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

The mother of Ivy Carow has met her death under very suspicious circumstances many years before the story begins, and Ivy, who is living with her guardian, Sir John Fortescue, at Starham, is dimly conscious that a mystery surrounds her life. Meadow View, in which Ivy was born, has recently been let to George White, and his sister, who take more than ordinary interest in their neighbours. The Rev. Mr. Ainslie recognises in the sister of Mr. White the woman who visited him, under peculiar conditions, many years before, just prior to Ivy's mother's death. Sir John Fortescue and the millionaire are fast friends, and it is evident that the Baronet does not see to what a pass matters are drifting. Meanwhile Paul Beresford has declared his love for Ivy and Lady Fortescue is anxious to see them married. The news of their engagement comes as a surprise to Mr. White and his sister, but they do not openly show their uneasiness. Sir John is prevailed upon to delay the marriage for six months and to undertake a trip to Australia, and his wife accompanies him—Ivy is left in charge of Mrs. Austin, and fortunately has Paul Beresford to watch over her.

CHAPTER VI.

PAUL BERESFORD was not a man of extravagant habits. He had never known the pressure of poverty, for though his father had been unable to leave him a fortune he had given him, besides a finished education, practical and business-like habits, so that he was never likely to be in want of employment.

In addition to this Paul inherited by his father's will an excellent library, a small collection of art treasures, and about five hundred pounds in the bank.

The man whose last five-and-twenty years of life had been spent in adoration of his dead wife's memory was not likely to make many friends.

Guy Beresford was respected by all the poor in the district where he lived, but most Englishmen had forgotten the brilliant scholar who was once the pride of his college. Of the many comrades who had witnessed Guy's triumphs there was only one with whom the grave, sorrow-stricken widower had cared to keep up any attempt at intimacy.

Mr. Thomas Griffiths, of the Inner Temple, solicitor, was as great a contrast to Paul's father as could well have been found. The one spent his life prosaically in making money, and cared for no home ties; the other was utterly reckless as regarded pecuniary honours, and having made a home and lost its queen spent the rest of his days in mourning her.

Still, though they only corresponded once a year and met at still rarer intervals, the man of law in his musty chambers, and the lonely mourner in the vine-covered Italian home, were friends.

This being so, it is astonishing that Paul and Mr. Griffiths should never have been introduced to each other until the former came to England after his father's death.

He called then in the Temple, heard the will which gave him all the testator had to leave, and received a warmer greeting than he had expected.

Mr. Griffiths at once offered house-room to the library and the art collection. He insisted that a large empty room was entirely at their service.

Then he gave his friend's son much well-meant advice, and parted from him with the oracular statement that the good fortune his father had missed might come to him.

Mr. Beresford paid no particular heed to the wisk. He interpreted it in its vaguest sense—that as his father had gained neither riches, fame, or success, all these might be his if he worked for them, and he really went to work with very ambitious notions.

For two years he dreamed of sudden glory; then he became Mr. White's secretary, and from that point his career is known to us.

But all through those two years, though he worked sufficiently hard to get them, Paul was never without those little comforts which to my mind, make the difference between life and existence.

He never needed to deny himself ordinary refinements, and so, when he came to London as Ivy Carew's fiancé and the present possessor of three hundred a year, he sought out very pleasant chambers in Cecil-street, Strand, though, at Mr. Griffiths' advice, he only took them by the week.

"There's no knowing what may happen," said the lawyer, meaningly. "There may come a radical change in your circumstances, young man."

Paul smiled. He would have liked to tell the lawyer of his engagement, but Sir John's only stipulation had been that the betrothal should be kept secret until the wedding day was fixed, so the young lover could only smile and think to himself the "radical change" was, perhaps, nearer than Mr. Griffiths had any idea of.

The lawyer did not seem particularly elated by Paul's position at the "Security." He declared it was a good company enough; but the managers were crotchety, and apt to treat their officials with scant courtesy.

"I shall be all right, I think," observed Paul. "For one thing, I don't mean to stay with them over a year; and for another, Mr. White got me the post, and he is a personal friend of the directors."

"I don't think that's particularly to his credit."

"Why?" exclaimed Paul, in consternation. "What can you mean? Aren't they respectable?"

"Perfectly; only when the company had not long been started, to launch it the directors made one or two extraordinary concessions to the public. I remember one man told me it was well-named the 'Security' since it offered perfect safety to murderers. There was a strong feeling its regulations were risky; but I think it is dying out now, and the office itself has a good name, though the directors have never quite been forgiven."

"But what did they do?"

"They made an insurance policy payable if death occurred the very day after the first premium had been paid. The will holds good still. Say you are penniless, and you have a wife, besides half-a-dozen children. Insure your life for five thousand in the

'Security' to-day, commit suicide to-morrow, and the money's available for your family."

"It seems like putting a premium on crime."

"It does. But as a fact I never heard of a case of suicide among the company's customers. I suppose when people are so down on their luck as to want to make away with themselves, they've no heart to think of insuring their lives. Still, Paul, I'm glad you're only going to be there a short time. I don't approve of changes; but though there's nothing to take hold of, I don't really like the reputation of the 'Security,' and I should not care for your father's son to pass the best part of his life in their office."

This accusation came back to Paul with strange force, as he found a letter, under the official seal, on his breakfast-table. He knew two of the directors had been in town the day before, and that the manager had been shut up with them for over an hour; but what that could possibly have to do with him in his private capacity he had no idea.

And the note did not tell him much. It merely said he would be desired to leave London on urgent official business; therefore would he be good enough to take his portmanteau to King William Street when he repaired there.

"What a nuisance!" was Mr. Beresford's reflection. "Why, I may be away a week, and Ivy here in London! I begin to wish I had remained George White's private secretary, and never transferred my services to the 'Security.'"

But over head and ears in love, as he certainly was, Paul had the sense to know there was nothing he could take umbrage at in the request. Before he signed his agreement with the company, he had seen a clause by which he consented to leave London for them if their interests so demanded. His salary would be increased, and his travelling expenses paid, but these details were no compensation. Escape was out of the question. He could not possibly say to the directors,—"I am engaged to be married, and I can't leave my lady love!"

"Perhaps it will only take three days," ruminated poor Mr. Beresford. "Anyway, I must see Ivy before I go."

He was at the office before his time, and received the compliments of the directors on his dispatch. Then the bombshell broke. They required him to go to Edinburgh at once; the gentleman in charge of the branch there was seriously ill, and Mr. Beresford was to fill his place.

"You had better go by the twelve o'clock express," said the elder director, blandly. "You have two hours before you: ample time to reach King's Cross, and then lunch."

Ample, indeed, for both purposes, but hardly a liberal allowance for a lover's farewell, specially if that has to be said at the West End, and he is in the City.

Paul hired the fleetest hansom he could find, promised the driver double fare if he was quick, and rattle down to Coningsby Street in no time.

Alas! the ladies were out, and no one knew accurately when they would return. Poor young man! He waited until his chances of catching the twelve o'clock train were well-nigh jeopardized; then he left a disconsolate note of farewell, and rattled back to King's Cross to commence the most distasteful journey of his life.

And when he reached Edinburgh, and had put in an appearance at the "Security" office, all hope of getting away in three days or even a week forsook him.

The man, whose place he had come to fill, was dangerously ill. His subordinates

were mere boys, and in his anxiety to keep the business together he had struggled against his illness, and neglected all precautions.

One look at Paul, one sight of his credentials, and sure his work was in good hands, he succumbed to the entreaties of wife and doctor, and went to bed.

Mrs. Campbell begged Paul to make their house his headquarters—at any rate, for the present.

She was a pretty, dark-eyed girl, evidently in a very early state of her married life. Evidently she regarded Mr. Beresford as a species of good angel sent to relieve her husband of all care; and the way she talked of his being able at last to give up and take a thorough rest convinced poor Mr. Beresford she counted on his taking Mr. Campbell's place for a month or even longer.

A good night's rest, and he was ready for work. He found the place he had come to fill no sinecure. There was work enough in the office for four intelligent men, and he was single-handed, except for two very juvenile clerks.

It dawned on Paul he was to know more of positive toil than he had ever done before. The office hours were the same as in London; but here he had to take the books home with him, and work at them in the evening, or he could never have made any way at all.

Of course he wrote to Ivy, and told her of his grief at having to leave her without a word of farewell; and Ivy wrote back that Mr. Campbell must make haste and get well, for she really could not spare him long. But the days passed on, and still Mr. Campbell kept his bed; and the office in King William-street showed no signs of sending anyone to relieve Paul Beresford.

He wrote to Ivy constantly, and she answered him as regularly, but after the first fortnight there grew a strange constraint in her letters.

It seemed to Paul she was trying to keep something back. In vain he read and re-read the girlish epistles. There was nothing he could take hold of, and yet "reading between the lines" he felt the letters were not Ivy's own natural style. She was hiding something.

But what?

Not unhappiness. She never failed to say that Mrs. Austin was kindness itself, and that Mr. White—whose business in Spain had been far shorter than poor Beresford's in Scotland—was always trying to amuse her. Not dulness; there was always a long list of places she had been to and people she had seen, but yet the fact remained the letters were strangely unlike Ivy.

Christmas fell upon a Thursday, and Paul had cherished great hopes of a trip to England. Surely he could leave on Wednesday, and stay over Sunday in the South. He had made his plans when a letter from Ivy told him Mrs. Austin proposed to spend Christmas in the Isle of Wight.

It completely upset Paul's plans. By travelling all night he could have managed to reach London on Christmas Day. The office, in a truly uncharitable spirit, insisted on his being at his post on the Saturday, so that even if Mrs. Austin had inquired, as she ought to have done, in Coningsby-street, a day and a-half would have been the extent of his happiness with Ivy; but the extra journey to the Isle of Wight was quite out of the question. He would have arrived late on Christmas night, and had to start before daybreak the next morning.

Perhaps his disappointment betrayed itself in his letter, for Ivy's answer had a great strain running through it. She seemed to think, as he would so soon be free from all connection with the

"Security," he need not inflict such disappointment on himself and her in the company's service. She could not understand that, to his delicate sense of honour, so long as he received their money, he was bound to do his best for them, even if he knew he should leave them the next week.

It was not a quarrel, rather a coldness between the lovers; it was just the tiniest little rift within the lute, just the slightest marring of the perfect harmony in thought and feeling that had been between them; and then, with the first months of the New Year, Ivy's letters grew fewer and shorter. Loving and tender they were, yet brief even to abruptness; and she never by any chance alluded to Paul's answers, never replied to the questions he asked her, and at last one of these strange letters had a stranger post-mark.

"Are you getting tired of me, dear?"

It was the beginning of February now; Paul had been away from London two months. Mr. Campbell was quite restored to health, and he now daily expected his recall. But Ivy's question had troubled him. Why should she have asked it unless the wish was futher to the thought? Had she seen anyone she preferred to him; and to excuse her own fickleness, did she, perchance, hope he was getting tired of her?

Pretty Mrs. Campbell was quite concerned at the change in her visitor (for she and her husband had insisted on Paul's remaining their guest); and one evening when Mr. Campbell had gone to lie down, and her baby was in bed she made a desperate plunge, and asked Mr. Beresford point blank if he had had bad news.

She was a dear little thing, devoted to her husband and her long-robbed baby, but yet with plenty of interest left for other's troubles. She had taken a fancy to Paul; she regarded his arrival as having saved her Willie's life, and there was nothing in the world she would not have done to help him.

"No," said Mr. Beresford, gravely. "Not had news exactly; only—"

"Only there's someone in the south who thinks you've been away from her long enough; is that it, Mr. Beresford?"

"I was wondering whether she did not mean I had better stay away altogether."

Bessie looked at him and understood.

"It's just a lovers' quarrel."

"We haven't quarrelled!"

"She wants you back, and thinks you might make more haste. She doesn't know how you've been tied here."

Her sympathy was irresistible. Paul opened his heart, and told the little lady all he could; how her letters had grown so few and short; how his darling was a great heiress, and he a plain worker in life's line. What did Mrs. Campbell think? Was Ivy repenting her promise? Did she want him to give her back her freedom?

"I should like to shake you!" said little Mrs. Campbell fiercely. "What right have you to think such wicked things?"

"It looks like it!"

"It doesn't!"

It was delightful to have his gloomy fancies contradicted; but they were too rooted to give way all at once.

"I should have seen her at Christmas if only she had been reasonable, and stayed in London. What caprice could take her to the Isle of Wight? It must have been on purpose to avoid me?"

"Nonsense!"

"It seems like it."

"You deserve a scolding! You say yourself she is staying with strangers—people in no way related to her—not even very old friends. Do you suppose a young girl would dictate to her hostess where to spend Christmas?"

"But Mrs. Austin would do nothing against Ivy's wishes."

"How long had you been engaged at Christmas, pray?"

"Two months."

"And you think the child had got used to it sufficiently to talk about her affection!"

"Why not?"

"She is a girl, and girls don't talk; they fret. You don't suppose when I was engaged to Willie I could talk about him to strangers, and tell anyone I couldn't go anywhere they wanted because it would lose me a sight of him. I think your Ivy much too good for you!"

"She is, indeed, but—"

"And if you've let her see you think yourself injured, of course her letters have grown fewer and shorter."

"I haven't."

"Are you sure?"

"I never meant to."

"Maybe you've done it without the meaning. Well, you will soon be going south, and then you can put things straight. I believe you've fancied yourself quite miserable."

"I feel wretched."

Mrs. Campbell grew just a little graver.

"You say her letters are really altered?"

"Undenially. Why?"

"Nothing."

"I am sure you had a reason for asking."

"I had."

"Tell it me."

"I don't like to."

"You will distress me by refusing."

"It may be all my mistake, and then I shall have alarmed you foolishly, but as I see you mean me to give in I will tell you. I often take in the letters, and always sort them; so you see, without being inquisitive or prying, I couldn't help knowing your chief correspondent was a lady, and I guessed you were going to marry her."

"You guessed quite right."

"Well, the last month the letters have been fewer—much fewer."

"Just what I said," interrupted Paul.

"You see you have remarked it yourself." Bessie hurried on. Even if her words pained him it was best he should hear them; they might at least substitute another fear for the one he had suffered to approach him.

"I had a theory of my own to explain why the letters were so few. The writing has altered too; it is quite changed from the pretty flowing hand it used to be. When I saw you dull and troubled I felt sure my guess was right, and illness had seized on your correspondent."

"Illness!"

"Now, don't let me frighten you."

"She never said a word about being ill."

"Of course not; she would not make you anxious. I suppose you keep her letters?"

"I keep them!" cried Paul indignantly.

"Do you think I am a heartless monster, Mrs. Campbell? Of course I keep them."

"Then when you go upstairs to-night compare the letter you had this morning—I won't say with those you have had lately, but with the first you received since you came!"

Paul took her hand.

"It will be a cruel blow if you are right, but not so cruel as what I feared."

"You are going into the other extreme, Mr. Beresford. I never meant seriously ill; the sight of you and happiness will soon put things to rights. Perhaps Miss Ivy would say other letters had been few and short lately, besides hers."

Paul winced.

"Don't be afraid of losing her," said the happy young wife, gently, "and don't

be afraid of telling her that you love her. I think why so many marriages turn out sadly is because husbands get into a way of letting their wives take their love for granted."

"I am sure Campbell doesn't."

She smiled brightly.

"We married on next to nothing, and people said we were very foolish; we were desperately in love too, and kind friends told us housekeeping on small means would soon wear that away; there was nothing like poverty, they said, for taking the gilt off the gingerbread. That is more than a year ago, Mr. Beresford, and I don't quite know what they meant by the gingerbread; but if the expression stood for our life, love gilds it just as much now as it did on our wedding-day."

"I am sure of that."

"I am giving you quite a lecture. Willie says I am a dreadful chatterbox."

"I wish you knew Ivy."

"I wish I did. You will bring her to see me some day?"

"Indeed I will."

"And remember, you are not to fancy her at death's door because of my little suggestion; but you are to be very kind and gentle to her because she loves you, and she has no mother."

"I wish she was staying with you now."

"Don't you like the people she is with, or can't you forgive them for taking her to the Isle of Wight?"

Paul hesitated.

"They are kindness and hospitality itself. I could not find a fault with either of them, and yet—"

"Don't trouble to explain," said Bessie Campbell. "Is not this what you mean?"

"I do not like you, Dr. Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell."

He smiled.

"Something like it."

"I know just what you feel," said Mrs. Campbell, quaintly. "There is a man who comes to see Willie on business sometimes who always makes me shudder. He has some great influence with the directors, and he has been here twice. Willie brought him into lunch. Do you know I had never seen him, never heard of him before, and yet when he shook hands with me I felt a cold shudder creep over me?"

"That is terrible. Now, my experiences of Mr. White and his sister are not so bad as that. I simply cannot like them."

"Mr. White!" Bessie Campbell spoke quite eagerly. "Is he a millionaire? Is his Christian name George?"

"Yes, to both questions."

"How very strange!"

"What is?"

"Why he is my *bête noir*, the very man I was telling you of who makes me shiver!"

She shivered then, even as she spoke.

"It must be a natural antipathy," said Beresford. "The strangest thing is, Ivy herself shared it once."

"Then how could you leave her in his clutches?"

Paul felt this a little unfair.

"I could not help myself; her uncle selected Mr. White's sister as Ivy's guardian during his absence in Australia. Neither she nor I was consulted."

"When will he be home?"

"In two or three months."

"And you are expecting your recall daily? Mr. Beresford, does it matter very much to you if you lose your post at the 'Security'?"

"I should not like to lose it under any circumstances derogatory to my honour."

She sighed.

"Well, your release is sure to come soon; otherwise I should advise you to put all

prudent considerations aside, and start for London to-morrow."

"Then you think she is very ill?"

"I think that I should be very ill if my health failed when I was that man's guest. I have a horror of him!"

"And yet he is not a bad looking man."

Mrs. Campbell sighed.

"I don't think men ever have such things as instincts. When I saw Mr. White I felt he was a bad man; I can't explain what told me, only I knew it. Willie has tried again and again to persuade me Mr. White is a most worthy Christian and philanthropist. Now, generally I believe every word my husband says; but I can't believe him in this."

Beresford looked perplexed.

"I wish her uncle and aunt had never left her."

"I am going to bed now," said Mrs. Campbell, "and I shall send Willie to have one cigar. Don't keep him up late, please; and, Mr. Beresford, you can trust my husband with any secret."

Paul felt that already. He had taken a great fancy to the quiet, reserved man, who was such a contrast to his bright, vivacious little wife.

For some little while the two smoked in silence, then Beresford said—

"Your wife tells me you know George White, the famous millionaire."

"I have met him twice."

"I wish you would tell me your true opinion of him."

Mr. Campbell smiled.

"Bessie has been setting you to ask this? I know she has a perfect horror of the man. We are forced to meet him sometimes, and so I don't let her think I share her opinion of him lest his visits should really alarm her."

"Then you don't like him?"

"I don't."

"But why?"

"Is he a friend of yours?"

"Oh, no."

The Scotchman looked into the fire.

"I don't believe in the presentiments my little wife is so fond of; but for all that she's right about White. He's a bad man."

"But how?"

Mr. Campbell shrugged his shoulders.

"Bessie never saw him till lately. I met him ten years ago. He was then a penniless adventurer. I don't mean to say a man must be a knave because he rises from beggary to be a millionaire; but when with his change of fortune he changes also his name, his appearance, and his relations, I judge there must be some crime in his past life he desires to hide."

Beresford put one hand on his friend's arm.

"Help me," he half cried, half whispered, "The girl I love more than life—who will, I hope, soon be my wife—is now that man's guest. Her only relations are in Australia, and she is utterly at his mercy."

The Scot smoked on in perfect silence.

"Help me," again pleaded Paul. "You have a wife of your own. Surely you understand the matter is life and death to me?"

Mr. Campbell removed his pipe.

"Is the young lady rich?"

"She will be when she comes of age, in about sixteen months."

"Has she powerful friends?"

"Her uncle is a baronet of large fortune."

"Then you need not distress yourself. George White is a coward at heart (unless he has changed his nature with his name). He would not dare to injure any one with friends able to avenge it; and as your fiancée is a minor, even if he drew her into any worthless speculation, she would really lose nothing."

"Your opinion of him is pretty bad?"

"As bad as it could be; only I won't let Bessie know it. Of course he has got a reputation for probity and commercial honesty, and all that. I believe he has kept pretty straight lately, but the fact remains ten years ago he was a penniless vagrant. If he had simply got on by fair means, even by luck, he needn't have changed his whole appearance? An altered name would have been enough. I assure you, when I first met him here, I was astonished."

"But you recognised him?"

"By a fluke. He always had a trick of biting his lips. I have seen him do it till the blood came. Look at Mr. White's lips; they are almost as thick as a negro's. Ask any one, and he will tell you the result of perpetual biting or moistening the lips is to make them thick and unwieldy."

"It is a small thing to go on."

"Is it. Have you ever noticed his eyes?"

"They are too light for the rest of his face. Hair, brows, and skin are all intensely dark; the eyes alone indicate fair origin."

"Art has advanced a great deal," said the Scot, composedly; "but it is not yet possible to die your eyes—at least I think not."

Paul sighed.

"Have I convinced you?" asked Mr. Campbell.

"I can hardly say convinced; I have always had stray doubts of George White. If only Sir John had left Ivy in other hands!"

"She will be quite safe," reassuringly. "I can say that fearlessly. George White is a born coward; and, besides, if he worships anything it is rank and wealth. A baronet's niece and a heiress will be perfectly free from danger. Still, if the young lady were my fiancée—"

He stopped. Paul looked at him imploringly.

"Do go on."

"Well, it's not particularly proper advice for the head of a family to give, but if my fiancée were under George White's roof I should speedily move her to mine."

"But how?"

The other laughed.

"I thought I should shock you. Marry her, of course."

"But she is a minor?"

"Even so the marriage is legal, unless forbidden by the guardians. Since you say they are in Australia they are hardly likely to appear to forbid the nuptials."

Paul groaned.

"If only she had not that miserable money I'd take your advice."

"But as it is you can't risk losing that!"

"Sir!" Paul's face was ablaze with indignation. "My only fear is that if I married her, as you suggest, there being no settlements, her uncle might think I hurried on the match to keep the disposal of her fortune in my own hands."

"You could soon disprove that."

"How?"

"You have no debts?"

"Not a penny."

"Then marry your bride one day, and give back her fortune to be settled on her the next. The thing's simple enough."

Paul looked into the fire.

"Mr. Campbell," he said, gravely, "if only Ivy will come to me like that I will make her my wife within a week of my return to London. I can't describe it to you; but all you have told me of the man White finds an echo in my own heart. I only wish Ivy's uncle did not believe in him so thoroughly."

"Refer the uncle to me. I have given you no particulars, because I don't want to

betray the man's past needlessly; but if your fiancée's guardian at all resents your summary actions send him to me, and I'll tell him that about his millionaire which will make him shudder to think he ever touched the man's hand."

Mrs. Campbell's voice was heard, asking if they knew the time. Paul's conscience smote him; he had kept the invalid up to well-nigh midnight.

"No apologies!" said Campbell, kindly. "It's not so long since I was in your position, and I'm quite sure if I had thought Bessie was in any danger I should have kept a dozen people up to try and help me save her."

He wrung Paul's hand, and they parted for the night. Mr. Beresford went to his own room; but though the fire burnt brightly, and the gas gave a cheerful light, no words will convey the hard, desolate sense of trouble that seemed to Paul to pervade the whole of the little room.

Mrs. Campbell had done him one good service—all his doubts of Ivy had fled. Comparing her first letter with her last he saw only too plainly the change in her writing, and marvelled that he had never noticed it before.

Of course, Bessie's explanation was the right one—his darling had been ill. But Paul remembered her own words, that she had never been ill in her life, and he found it difficult to think of any malady that could have wrought such havoc as to change her very writing.

Reading the letters again one by one the sadness of the later ones touched him, specially also the fact that they contained no single allusion to his own.

Could it be that Mr. White had suppressed his loving rhapsodies?

Poor Paul! There came back to him all the circumstances of his acquaintance with George White.

He remembered how, when he first went to Meadow View, the millionaire had charged him to discover whether Miss Carow were engaged, and if she had fair health. He knew from Lady Fortescue it was at Mr. White's suggestion Ivy's marriage was deferred till summer.

Although the Australian trip had been determined by Cousin Alexander's letter, the first mention of it had been bruited some days before by Mr. White.

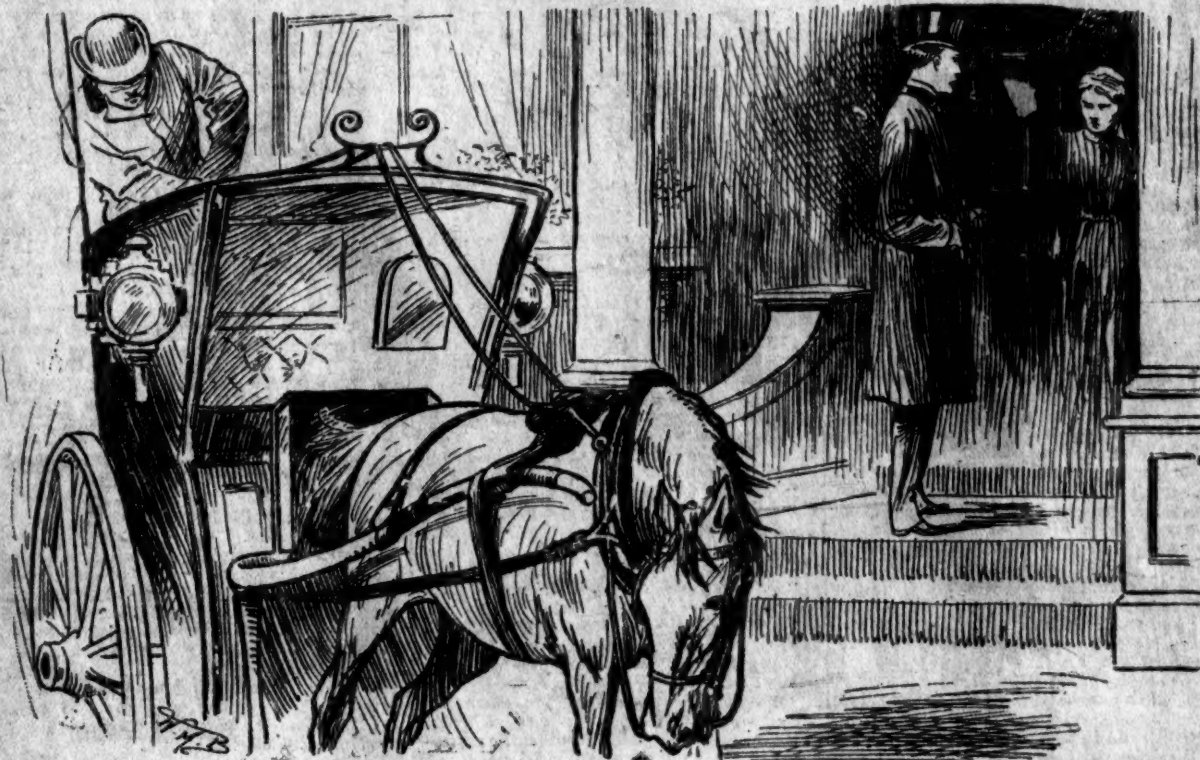
"Heaven forgive me if I wrong him," sighed Paul; "but it looks to me as if he had acted all through with but one object—to defer our marriage, if not to put it off entirely. But what can be his object? If he had wanted my darling for himself he would surely have paid her attention in those long days when my poverty kept me silent. From his first meeting with Ivy his manner to her has been that of a fatherly friend, never of a lover! That he is against my hopes, and would rob me of my darling I firmly believe; but I cannot see his object, for I am as certain as man can be that he never hoped to marry her himself."

If only Sir John had not taken that Australian trip, or if only Lady Fortescue's wifely devotion had not constrained her to accompany him!

Looking the position full in the face Paul felt it was a terribly perplexing one. However sure he felt himself of Mr. White's duplicity he had not the slightest proof of it.

To unprejudiced eyes the millionaire and his sister were Ivy's kindest friends and protectors. Though William Campbell said he knew things to Mr. White's discredit, what was—in public opinion—the testimony of a mere clerk against the owner of a million of money!

Looking anxiously over all he had ever



THE SERVANT LOOKED SUSPICIOUSLY AT THE VERY EASY VISITOR WHO ASKED FOR MISS CAREW.

heard of Ivy's history Paul's fears increased; save her uncle and aunt she had no relations in the world. And he had never heard of any very intimate friends—mere friends, too, would have to be intimate indeed to venture to interfere with the guardians Sir John had chosen for his niece.

Paul Beresford sat long into the night thinking, but before he went to bed his mind was made up on two points. He would tell Ivy all his distrust of Mr. White, and if she would only let him make her his wife he would marry her privately three days after his return to London.

What if people did call him a fortune-hunter, or assert he had been in a strange hurry to wed his wealthy bride? Could he not bear a few harsh criticisms rather than let his darling run the risk of a longer residence in the house of a man whom even honest, kindly-natured William Campbell denounced!

With the thought of a hurried marriage came, perhaps, naturally the memory of Mr. Ainslie.

Paul started. What had he been about to forget Ivy's godfather, the man who had known her all her life, and who enjoyed Sir John's utmost confidence?

Of course the Vicar of Starham was the very man to confide his woes to, and Paul sat down there and then to write to him.

His letter told Mr. Ainslie very few details. It merely reminded him how he had once distrusted Mrs. Austin and her brother.

"I cannot explain matters in a letter," wrote Paul; "but I have grievous fears that your suspicions were too well founded. I hope to be in London in a day or two. If I telegraph to you from there will you join me for Ivy's sake?"

He slept better when that letter was sealed and stamped; but still his face had a haggard, anxious look when he found the Campbells at breakfast, and even the official summons to return to the head office in King William-street could not clear all the shadows from his brow.

"Good-bye!" said Bessie to him, when he was starting. "I know you are anxious, but I think all will be well. Willie has told me you may have to be married earlier than you intended. If Miss Carew's relations are still away, and she would be contented with a very quiet wedding, couldn't you bring her here, and let us play the parts of father and mother?"

It was a kindly offer, and Paul thanked her warmly. He meant to accept it if Ivy would agree; for by this time his fears had reached such a pitch that he was quite willing to leave the "Security" without even a week's notice, if it seemed desirable.

The first thing to be done, of course, was to see Ivy. He travelled by the night train; and so it was quite early in the day—barely ten o'clock—when, having surprised his landlady in Cecil-street, and enjoyed a breakfast and cold bath, he took a cab and drove to the millionaire's residence in Coningsby-street.

The servant who opened the door was a stranger to him, and looked rather suspiciously at the very easy visitor, who asked for Miss Carew.

"Miss Carew is not here, sir."

Paul started.

"But she was staying here with Mrs. Austin. I heard from her not three days ago!"

"Possibly, sir. I'm not one of the regular servants, but only a caretaker. The whole

establishment were sent away [on] board wages yesterday."

"But the family?"

"Can't say, sir. They've gone South for the rest of the winter, I believe. I saw the cab drive off myself yesterday—two ladies and Mr. White."

"But where did they go?"

"Somewhere South. I didn't hear the name, sir," and then, having nothing more to communicate, the caretaker stolidly shut the door in Mr. Beresford's face.

(To be continued.)

(This story commenced in No. 1974. Back Nos. can be obtained through any newsagent.)

A Pathetic Love Story.

Beryl's Engagement

By FLORENCE HODGKINSON

This long complete story appearing in our next issue is of a very pathetic character and illustrates the danger of playing with edged tools.

The moral is distinctly healthy and will commend itself to all our readers.

Our Brilliant Story UNSEEN FIRES grows



"I LOVE HIM. I GAVE MY LIFE FOR HIM ONCE, AND WOULD AGAIN," WERE WORDS THAT REACHED VALENTINE'S EARS.

UNSEEN FIRES.

By EFFIE ADELAIDE ROWLANDS.

This story commenced last week.

The demand for the first number was so great that the Publisher had a difficulty in supplying copies promptly. We trust that all who were anxious to read the opening chapters of this thrilling romance have now obtained copies. If not, and they will write at once to the Publisher, enclosing the necessary stamps, he will do his best to supply a copy.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS I. AND II.

Valentine Eyre is riding through a forest in Spain when his attention is arrested by the sight of the beautiful gipsy girl Zitella. Valentine ascertains that she is betrothed to Hermann, a member of the gipsy band, and he would spare her if possible from a loveless marriage. Zitella disguised as a peasant boy brings Valentine news of Hermann's intention to kill him, and as Zitella's action has made it impossible for her to return to her old life, Valentine undertakes to adopt her, and she is sent to England to be educated.

CHAPTER III.

It was late on the evening of the following day when Valentine reached his home. He had not halted either for rest or refreshment since he left Madrid, and now his head reeled with the faintness of exhaustion as he flung himself out of the saddle, and passing beneath the marble portico entered the silent house.

The death-like stillness and gloom which seemed to reign everywhere filled him with guilty terror, and in the middle of the vast hall he suddenly stopped short, not because

his limbs, stiff and cramped with long riding, refused to carry him any further, but because he was smitten by a remembrance of his first arrival at Cemema, when in this very hall, almost on this very spot, he had been affectionately received by his cousin Celia who then appeared to him the loveliest and sweetest girl he had ever seen.

But this was no time for such retrospect, for Celia, now his wife, lay dying upstairs, and nerving himself for the first meeting with her whom he had not seen for years, Valentine was passing on when a sob out of one of the dim corners smote on his ear like a curse.

The sound was followed by a little form, and looking down with startled eyes Valentine saw his own son, Juan, a handsome dark-eyed boy of some three or four years old.

"My child! What is it?" gasped Valentine, laying his hand on the dark head, and shrinking from the answer which, though he knew not why, he felt must come.

There was a moment's silence, and then came what he waited for with a sob more bitter than before,—

"Mamma is dead. My father killed her. I heard them say so; but they would not let me into the room."

Without another word the boy turned away, and retired once more to his dim corner, and Valentine could hear his child's sobs as he himself stood paralysed with remorse which was more bitter than grief.

"Oh, Heaven!" he cried at last, wildly, "what misery is mine! My own child accuses me, and yet it is true."

Then stretching out his hands, beating the air as one who gropes his way in blind-

ness, Valentine passed through the hall and upstairs.

Little Juan had told the truth when he said his mother was dead, for by degrees Valentine learned that the messenger who brought him news of his wife's illness had been unavoidably delayed, and Celia, according to the expression of her last most urgent wish, had been interred on the day previous to her husband's arrival.

The English physician, an old friend of the family, who had attended the death-bed, had already left the neighbourhood, so that Valentine learned but little of the particulars of his wife's last days, for he noticed that the servants all avoided him, and except for a few questions put to Celia's maid, and answered very unwillingly, Valentine shrank from making any inquiries.

All that he learned was this, that for the last year Celia had been the unconscious victim of a disease which once having made itself known had increased with such alarming rapidity that in a very few days it was known to all that death was inevitable.

"But if my dear mistress had been happy," added the maid, significantly, "she would be here with us now."

And hearing these bitter words Valentine turned away with a groan that testified to his late and deep remorse.

In Celia's desk, when he had the courage to approach it, Valentine found a sealed packet inscribed with his own name, and fearing, yet eager, to behold the contents broke the seal.

The packet when opened disclosed a will drawn up in a perfectly legal manner, and witnessed by Dr. Maynard and the maid Isabella.

Increasingly fascinating with every Chapter.

By this document, to which her husband was named sole executor and trustee, Celia had left house and lands and money, with all that she died possessed of, in trust to Valentine Eyre, for their baby son, whom she wished to be known always by the name of De Nunaz. Should Valentine Eyre outlive his son then all was to be his to dispose of as he pleased. For some reason the testator expressed her urgent wish that both the children should be brought up in England and apart from their father. For the girl Romola no provision had been made, but a reason was given for this omission in the letter of farewell which accompanied the legal document.

"You know, my husband," wrote Celia, "how fatal to my happiness was the possession of a large fortune. You know how keenly my father felt the want of a son to perpetuate his name until you came; and he formed a plan of which I knew nothing until on his death-bed he implored of us to let him see us made one before he died. You referred the matter to me, and I, believing that you loved me, but thinking most of my father's happiness, consented to become your wife, and so the waiting clergyman joined our hands, after which my father passed peacefully away, having blessed us with his dying breath.

"You remember, my husband, how nobly you tried to play the part of a loving husband to me; but you were no hypocrite by nature, and one day in a secret place you dropped the mask and cried to Heaven to set you free from your hateful bonds. Your wild words reached my ear, and I resolved that your heart and life should no longer be straitened by me. A few days passed, and then in your path you found a letter which told you that your wife was false, and as you read it I came upon you to be confronted and accused in bitter words of basest treachery to which I replied with scorn that there had been no word of love or faith in our bond. So we parted, and from that hour I was dead to you as if I had never been. Now, at the last, I reveal the truth that my children may revere their mother's memory. I leave my girl untrammelled by wealth but what you may chose to provide. Dr. Maynard has been a kind friend. He may help you to carry out my last desire."

The letter ran on in short and broken sentences; but Valentine could read no more. The bitterness of late knowledge and late remorse was upon him, but it was not until he found the open hillside grave in which Celia had chosen to be laid that he realized the full beauty of what he had lost. He effaced the unhappy years of his married life and went back to the time of his cousinship with Celia, and thinking of those happy days and his own dark future his heart cried out bitterly,—

"The better part of life was ours,
The worst can be but mine."

One attempt, and one attempt only, did Valentine make to see his children.

Many days had passed, solitary days, which he had spent in his own room shrinking in exaggerated remorse from all contact with his fellow men; but at last continued isolation was more than one of his fervid imaginative temperament could bear; and maddened by the scourge of self-reproachful memories, Valentine rushed forth to find some distraction from his torture.

The sound of childish voices led him to the nursery, where the children, their brief sorrow over, were indulging in a merry game, and making the four walls ring with the sound of their gleeful laughter, until, with Valentine's entrance, a sudden silence fell upon them; and, uttering a hasty word, the nurse and her underling withdrew,

leaving their master alone with his boy and girl.

The two children stood shy and silent for a moment, Romola wavering between fear and longing to approach her father, while Juan maintained a defiant attitude, his dark brows bent in a lowering, sullen cloud, which completely stamped out the look of innocent childhood.

Valentine could bear the suspense no longer; but when he would have taken his little girl in his arms, Juan snatched her away with an angry cry.

"You must not go to him, Roma; he is a bad, cruel man! He killed our mother!"

Romola was terrified by these passionate words.

She broke, sobbing, from her little brother, and clasped her father's knee.

"Is that true?" she asked, entreatingly, looking up at him with dim, wistful eyes.

"It is true! but, great Heaven, what a judgment!" cried Valentine, in harsh, broken tones. Then, putting the child roughly from him, he turned, and left the room, never to enter it again.

Dr. Maynard arrived in a few days, and to him Valentine poured forth his heart; but in the recital of Celia's wrongs he was so overcome that he bowed his head on the table, and cried out bitterly,—

"Oh, Heaven! if I had not darkened her life! If I could have loved her as she loved me!"

The doctor came and laid his hand on the young man's shoulder, saying, in his gruff way,—

"Spare yourself any further torture. Your marriage was truly unfortunate for both of you; but, whatever happened afterwards, you, I can swear, were not in the first step to blame. I came to you, and told you that your marriage with Celia might lengthen Don Juan's life; and affection for your uncle caused you to yield. The result is known to us both. Let us drop the unhappy subject once for all."

"I wish I could acquit myself of all wrong!" sighed Valentine, hopelessly.

"Be a man!" was the doctor's brisk retort. "Let me see," he continued, "there are the children to be discussed. Poor Celia, I see by this letter, wished me to find some lady who would undertake their charge."

"If you can help me in this," replied Valentine, eagerly, "you will be relieving my mind of a heavy weight."

"Humph! I can help you, I suppose? But do you think it right to consign your children to the care of a stranger?"

"Celia's wishes are sacred to me," replied Valentine, "and as I told you before, I dare not meet my own children, who have been taught to regard me as their mother's murderer."

"Tush! what humbug!" muttered the doctor, angrily; but having paced the room in silence for a few minutes he returned to his companion.

"If you are determined," he said, shortly, "to carry out your wife's wishes with regard to the children I think I know of a person exactly fitted by birth and education to undertake the responsibility."

Valentine looked up eagerly, and Dr. Maynard continued.

"I think I can promise you that Mrs. Alingham will readily accept the trust, and in her care you need have no fear for the children, for they will be as her own."

These words were uttered with marked emphasis, and in a graver tone the doctor went on,—

"My friend has not only lost her husband but met with many sad reverses, with which a weaker minded woman would have been

unable to cope. As it is, the poor thing's troubles have almost broken her down, and I am anxious that she should find a safe and happy home, with the affection of children to make her forget her past sorrow.

"Mrs. Alingham," continued the doctor, "is a woman of refinement and tact, and such a bright, lovable little soul, in spite of all her troubles, that the children cannot fail to be happy with her."

"She is English, of course?"

The doctor knitted his brow a little over the question, but after a brief silence, he replied—

"No, Mrs. Alingham is of Spanish parentage; but her birth is really all that remains to her of her nationality. Her husband was an Englishman, and she has adopted his country, his language, and, to a great extent, his ideas."

"But she is a Spaniard," objected Valentine; "and it was Celia's wish, as it is now mine, that the children should grow up under the influence of English associations."

"And Mrs. Alingham will be no stumbling-block," put in the doctor, eagerly. "Her chief desire is to forget her birthland and all its associations completely; but you shall see her, and judge for yourself."

"I shall not see her," replied Valentine, who shrank with keen dread from all contact with strangers. "Can you not manage this for me?" he added, in his most urgent tone.

The doctor frowned, coloured slowly, and toyed with his watch-chain, but after awhile he replied—

"I think you ought to rouse yourself and look after the interests of your own children. It would do you more good than brooding over an ill which cannot be mended."

Valentine thought his friend somewhat brutal, but refrained from saying so, and after all he reflected that this roughness of speech was only a mask for the kindest of hearts; nor was he mistaken, for having taken two or three turns through the room the doctor paused once more by the table.

"I think, for Mrs. Alingham's sake," said he, curtly, "that I will consent to see her for you, because my little friend has been through a great deal of trouble lately; and an interview with a stranger would be far more trying to her than it can possibly be for you."

Valentine was delighted; he breathed a sigh of relief, and feeling lighter of heart than he had done for many days, begged that Mrs. Alingham should be allowed to make her own terms; and promising that Valentine should either see or hear from him within the next few days, the doctor took his leave.

"I have told you that I do not approve of the plan; but there, a wilful woman will have her way."

"My dear friend, why make my lot harder for me? It is too late to retract now; but if sorrow comes, it must fall alone on me."

The first speaker was Doctor Maynard, the second, a beautiful dark-eyed woman of some five-and-twenty summers, but with the lines of sorrow and premature age in her face.

The two were seated together in the room of a house which looked out on the streets of a dull Spanish town; the room was a very poor one, having little furniture besides the sofa on which the lady was seated, following her companion's agitated movements with a deprecating glance.

"I can only repeat my former words," continued Doctor Maynard, testily, "so I shall say no more; what would be the use?"

"My dear, dear friend—"

Doctor Maynard pulled out a large pocket handkerchief and wiped his heated brow, then striding towards the sofa, paused before it in anything but a conciliatory mood.

"Celia, I have told you, as I faithfully promised, every word of my interview with your husband. If the attitude which I have described does not convince you that Valentine Eyre is true and noble nothing will."

Celia smiled faintly, but her smile was more mournful than tears.

"I know my husband is true and noble," she said, quietly, "but he never loved me, never could love me. I know that his feeling are intense, and now that he believes me dead; he is the victim of an exaggerated remorse, but that will soon pass away, leaving him to rejoice in his freedom from a hateful bondage."

"Hateful bondage!" repeated Doctor Maynard, angrily. "That is the wildest delusion that ever entered a woman's brain. What your husband now feels is genuine grief for your loss—grief which will never be entirely subdued."

Celia's eyes, which had been growing dimmer and dimmer for the last few minutes, now overflowed with tears, which ran like rain down her pale face.

"Oh! spare me a little, Doctor Maynard," she cried. "Do you think that if Valentine had ever loved me he would have left me alone for three years?"

"You banished him by your own deceit."

"It was for his happiness."

"It was a cruel fraud to which the last touch was put by your farewell letter. Do you know that his children have been taught to look on Valentine Eyre as your murderer!"

"Oh! Heaven forgive me if I have done wrong, but I shall do my best to rectify that error."

"Rectify in this way," cried the doctor: "go up to your husband, show him all your heart, and let the past be blotted out; that is the only possible way."

"It is impossible!" replied Celia, firmly; "and if you knew all you would not suggest it. Let us say no more! But, Doctor Maynard, I yearn to see my children; when will you bring them to me?"

"Don't ask me, Celia; have you not, with all your goodness, one spark of womanly pity in your heart, and if you were less dear to me than you are I would go this moment and confess all to Valentine Eyre, so bitterly do I repent of my share in the fraud!"

As he spoke, Dr. Maynard was standing with his back to Celia, so that he did not see her rise from the sofa at his words. He started when he felt the light but impressive touch of her hand on his arm.

"You did no wrong," she said in a clear firm tone. "I only am to blame; but I do not now, and never will, repent what I have done; but if you would keep me from further sin let my children come to me at once."

"Celia, what do you mean?"

"Never mind. I have gained you sufficiently; but tell me how soon I can leave this country."

"Your husband has received a letter from his father, who refuses to receive you and the children at Chanewage Court; therefore Larkenby Hall, the place which came to Valentine Eyre from his uncle, is being fitted up for your reception."

"Oh! this delay," gasped Celia, pressing her hands over her heart; "every hour which separates me from them is an age of torture."

"Suppose your husband should arrange to bring the children to you."

"Heaven forbid!" replied Celia, in an

agitated tone. "I feel that I could not sustain myself in his presence; but as for recognition, I fear it not, for the disguise which I have provided would deceive even my own father."

"You are a strangely misguided woman," was Dr. Maynard's solemn rejoinder; "but at any cost I will do my best for you."

A few minutes later he took his leave, determined to use all the means in his power to bring the estranged husband and wife together; but on his return to Cemema he found Valentine absent, having left for him, Dr. Maynard, a letter urging that the children should be consigned without loss of time to the care of their new governess.

CHAPTER IV.

ON one of the terraces at Regent's Park, N.W., was a house larger than its neighbours, and standing on a piece of ground which, stretching from back and front, afforded recreation for Mrs. Julien's pupils.

The laburnums and lilacs were in full bloom, but those at the back had rivals, for the tennis ground was occupied by four young girls, who, as the balls flew hither and thither, made the air resound with their merry laughter.

Mrs. Julien's pupils were all sweet, high-bred girls, but the beauty of the establishment was Zitella Don Leon.

From the first hour of her arrival at Bently House she had reigned supreme in the hearts of teachers and schoolfellows; and, conscious of her power, Zitella's disdain of her worshippers increased with every moment.

She devoted herself exclusively to her studies, repelling all confidences, receiving lavish caresses and flattering tributes to her beauty with the coldness of an ice maiden, and, except when there was some direct reward to be gained from the society of one or another, holding herself aloof from her young companions.

This coldness in her favourite pupil often puzzled and annoyed Mrs. Julien.

She saw that it was not the girl's true nature, for Zitella could be all things that her mood suggested; but frequently she chose to be sullen and reticent, and this was most often the case when Mrs. Julien desired some new acquaintance to be favourably impressed with the girl of whom she was both proud and fond.

Mrs. Julien sat in her open window above the merry laughter of her pupils, and while her fingers fashioned some delicate fancy work, her mind was occupied with Zitella.

"If this coldness were natural," she thought, "I should fear nothing; but it seems to me that Zitella wears it as a mask to hide her true nature, which I have yet failed to fathom; that her passions are intense and strong I feel sure, for her eyes are beyond her control, and when she is coldest they reflect the gleam of hidden fires."

By-and-by Mrs. Julien left her room, and, going to the tennis-ground, inquired for Zitella.

"Zitella!" cried the girls in a laughing chorus. "Oh! she is in the arbour, reading Tasso. She thinks tennis is waste of time."

Mrs. Julien passed on with a smile to the arbour, where the amber tresses of her favourite outtrivalled in beauty the golden tassels of the laburnum which drooped so gracefully above the bowed head.

"You should not remain so still, my love," said Mrs. Julien, as she paused by the girl's side.

Zitella looked up slowly from her book, and, strange to say, replied to the remonstrance of her schoolmistress with a very sweet smile.

"I have been so interested in my study," she murmured, "that I forgot the flight of time. You know, dear Mrs. Julien, how good my guardian has been to me, and how anxious I am to excel in knowledge, so that on his return he may be pleased with me."

Mrs. Julien smiled, well pleased with the tenderness of the girl's tone.

"Your guardian must be difficult to please if you disappoint him, Zitella; but there is no fear on that score, and you must not overwork, or you will repeat last year's experience, and find yourself once more recruiting at New Haugh under the care of Miss Frith."

Zitella frowned, as she had a way of doing, and bent her eyes upon her open page.

"I never want to see New Haugh again," she said, slowly; "but dear Mrs. Julien, talking of Miss Frith reminds me that I have a favour to ask of you. I want you to let me go with Miss Frith this evening to see her sick sister. Marion is a sweet girl," added Zitella, hastily, "and I think my visits do her good."

"What does your guardian say to this acquaintance, my dear?"

Zitella hastily drew a letter from her pocket, and read aloud the following extract:—

"I am pleased with all you say of your friend Marion Frith. Go to see her as often as Mrs. Julien will allow. You happy child to possess the gift of scattering sunshine where ever you go."

"My guardian flatters me," murmured Zitella, with a faint smile, as she restored the letter to her pocket; "but you will let me go to-night to see Marion Frith?"

"As your guardian approves of the acquaintance I grant your request with pleasure," replied Mrs. Julien; but the last night you went you stayed too late. If you are not back to-night by half-past ten I shall send Vickers, my maid, to fetch you."

"There will be no need," replied Zitella, quickly. "I promise most faithfully to be back by half-past ten."

After a little more conversation, Mrs. Julien went in doors, only pausing as she passed by to interchange a few pleasant words and smiles with the tennis-players; but could she have stolen one backward glance at Zitella, she would have found her furtive suspicions about the girl confirmed once for all.

With her governess's disappearance Zitella, after carefully glancing round to make sure that she was not observed, had drawn a folded paper from the bosom of her dress. On being opened, it proved to be a letter scrawled in a careless but educated hand; the quality of the paper testified that the writer was a gentleman, the scent of tobacco which pervaded it said something for his habits.

As Zitella's glance fell on the few hasty lines her face underwent a distinct and terrible change. In the flame which leapt to her eye it was plainly revealed that beneath the cold well-bred surface she presented to the world the heart of this girl, young as she was, had long been

"The secret food of fires unseen,"

and those alas not of a refining or purifying nature. Mrs. Julien had often remarked that among all her pupils Zitella was the most pure minded and refined. Deceived by the girl's love of study—the result of mere worldly ambition—the governesses, but especially their principal, were for ever lauding Zitella's spiritual nature, and setting her forth as a model to all her school-fellows. If they could only see her now, with the gorm of every evil passion stamped on her face, but hatred and fear

dominating all, as she read the lines on the paper in her hand.

"You will be surprised to hear from me," the letter ran; "but I am in London again and want to see you. I am in debt and difficulties as usual, only that I have gone a little deeper in the mire this time; but it is not to pour out my troubles that I seek an interview. I must tell you something which, if you are sensible, you will take as the best news you could hear.

"I shall look for you between eight and nine, and remember the old address. H.B."

It would be impossible to depict the flood of evil passion which swept over Zitella's face as she read these lines. Even with them, the proof of her mad folly, before she could scarcely believe that she, with her own hand, had a year ago wilfully destroyed her own ambitious designs, swept away the splendid fabric of worldly success and honour which, from the day on which she first met Valentine Byre, she had steadily woven for the future. As these thoughts passed through her mind her anger at herself was so great that she forgot all caution and exclaimed aloud:—

"Oh that I could have been so mad, so foolish! I cannot believe it! It seems like some dream, that I could have been cajoled by a few loving words, a few empty flatteries, into marriage with a penniless young man!"

Zitella shuddered and dropped her hands in her lap, her own madness seemed like some horrible dream to her. She found added bitterness in the fact that at that moment her pocket contained a letter in which Valentine Byre breathed a hope of soon returning to England.

"Oh, that he had returned a year ago!" was Zitella's frantic thought. "But it would go hard with her," she thought "if she had to forego all for which she had waited so long and worked so well."

She would not forego it. To-night she determined she would make some desperate struggle for freedom. She would appeal to Hugo to set her free from a marriage which was no more than a foolish freak. She did not think Hugo would need much persuasion, for she had, in spite of her folly, been only too careful to avoid all mention of Valentine Byre.

Her spirits rose in the prospects of success, and she went indoors smiling as she thought how cleverly she had deceived Mrs. Julien with the passage which she had pretended to read from her guardian's letter.

Zitella gloried in her clever deceptions and falsehoods, though sometimes she was inclined to acknowledge that such courses were dangerous and must be given up when her worldly success was established. She thought when her goal was once reached it would be easy to purify herself from all the mud she had gathered by the way.

Immediately after dinner Zitella went away in a hansom with Miss Frith, a governess who had been at Bently House for ten years, and who was greatly trusted by Mrs. Julien.

"Number nine, York-street," had been the address which the parlour-maid at Bently House was ordered to give the driver; but when they got to Baker-street the man was ordered to drive to a house in the neighbourhood of St. James's Park, after which Miss Frith shrank back in the hansom, cowering and trembling in every limb as if in terror of pursuit or discovery, while Zitella sat bolt upright, looking straight before her with languid indifference to all that was passing around, for, complaining of a slight cold, the girl, before setting out, had donned a black frock and a hood, which concealed every vestige of her hair from view; a winter cloak and thick

veil completed her attire, and rendered recognition impossible.

The silence was unbroken until their destination was reached, when the door of a quiet house being opened the pair entered; and leaving her companion in the hall, Zitella passed upstairs to a room, whose sole occupant was a handsome young man who, stretched at careless length on a sofa, was filling the air with clouds of smoke.

On Zitella's entrance, however, the young man removed his meerschaum from between his very handsome lips, and hastily rising, advanced to meet his visitor with an abashed air which was in striking contrast to the girl's haughty bearing.

"So you've come," said the young man at last. He had planned to meet his young wife with a most affectionate address, but he was somewhat daunted by her chilling scorn.

"I am here in reply to your letter, Hugo," was Zitella's frigid reply; and then as if suspecting something unusual she darted at her companion a swift, lightning glance. His face told her that he had some weighty communication or daring proposition to make.

While she hesitated, wondering what sort of manner it would be best to adopt she heard Hugo say in an abrupt and rather nervous tone:—

"Do you know that this is the anniversary of our wedding-day Zitella?"

"And so you sent for me that you might celebrate it!" was the sarcastic rejoinder.

Hugo drew his dark brows together in a frown. Zitella's words and manner galled him. He was accustomed to homage from women, and his vanity was easily piqued. If things had not been so desperate with him Zitella would have defeated her own object. Perhaps some idea of this entered her mind, for the next minute she said almost tenderly:—

"It was an evil day for you, Hugo, when you burdened yourself with a penniless wife."

The frown passed from Hugo's face, and in its place came a crimson flush which mounted to the roots of his hair. Zitella's words, with their semblance of truth and tenderness, had touched his better nature made him almost loathe the dishonourable deed he was about to do; but, as if reading his very thoughts, Zitella, as she seated herself, said impatiently:—

"You must get this interview over quickly, Hugo. I had to scheme to come, and I have not long to stay; besides, Miss Frith is waiting downstairs."

"Confound Miss Frith!" burst from the young man's lips with savage energy. "If she had done her duty and taken proper care of you a year ago I should not have been able to deceive and befool you as I did. The truth is, Zitella," he went on, in a hurried, shamed way, "I sent for you to-night to confess that our marriage was no marriage, and it was fortunate for you that your duenna woke up from her dream in time to part us at the church door, for you would never legally have been my wife. I married you under a feigned name, and it was no clergyman—"

He was interrupted by a cry from Zitella, who could scarcely conceal her exultation. Hugo, interpreting the sound to denote pain and anger, would have poured forth excuses and prayers for forgiveness, but he was again interrupted.

"What is your real name, Hugo Brand?" questioned Zitella, breathlessly; and without a moment's hesitation her husband replied:—

"Bond." Then with a laugh: "It is not a very distinguished name, so you see you did not lose very much by the exchange;

there's but the difference of one letter between the two."

"And you have no money, no connections?" asked Zitella, with a coldness which appalled her listener. Wild, selfish, good-for-nothing though he was, this girl's callousness was too much for him; however, he thought her attitude rendered any scruples on his part quite unnecessary. He need no longer shrink from the thought of deceiving her.

"I have neither money nor connections," he replied, sullenly, "so you see it will be better for you to help in cutting the past once for all."

Zitella's heart beat wildly. The game she had hardly hoped to win was being played into her hands. She could scarcely refrain from laughing aloud as she thought of it, but she was careful to let no gleam of joy appear on her face.

"I have been a fool!" she said at last, with feigned bitterness, "and I would that the record of my folly could be wiped out for ever."

"It is simply done," said Hugo. "We have but to agree to be strangers from this night forth—"

"I prefer a surer way," interrupted Zitella, drawing as she spoke a folded paper from her bosom. "This," she said, laying it before Hugo, "when signed by you will wipe out the past as it can possibly be wiped out. It is not likely," she added, coldly, "that either of us will ever wish to come together again; but it is well to be provided against all contingencies."

"What is it?" asked Hugo, as he glanced over the document.

"A statement proving that our marriage was not legally performed, and that when it was over we parted at the church door."

"With all my heart," said Hugo, as he rose from the sofa, and seizing a pen affixed his name to the statement which Zitella had drawn up.

"You have done wisely, my dear," was the young man's remark, as he handed back the document. "We were a pair of hot-headed young fools when we met at New Haugh last year; but twelve months have taught us wisdom, and we know that we can't live on air. I have not a penny, Zitella, for I have no rich relations, and not the smallest inclinations to work. In short, I am a good-for-nothing scamp, and it would be a vast pity for you to throw yourself away upon me."

"We part to-night for ever," replied Zitella, indifferently. Then, with a cold and hurried farewell, she left the room and hastened downstairs to communicate the news of her freedom to the unhappy Miss Frith, who, since her pupil's escapade at New Haugh, had lived with the constant fear of discovery suspended like a drawn sword over her head.

Zitella's footsteps had scarcely died away on the stairs before the man who called himself Hugo buried his face in the sofa pillow to smother the laughter which he could not suppress.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "I may congratulate myself on having got well out of the very worst mess I was ever in; but that Zitella should have been so anxious to get rid of me was the last thing I expected. I should feel piqued by her coldness, but that I am so happy in my release; and now for Eastshire, who knows nothing of my secret, and who, like a good brother, has promised once more to pay my debts."

As as they drove back to Regent's Park Zitella remarked to her companion:—

"Now I dare to breathe freely for the first time in twelve long months. This chapter in my life is turned down, cut out for ever. Hugo Brand will never trouble me again."

"You were very inconsiderate to me when you married him, Zitella," remarked Miss Frith, who could not forget that discovery of her pupil's folly would mean her ruin, because she had not looked better after her charge.

"But," rejoined Zitella, scornfully, "had Hugo Bond been the rich man I thought him, all would have been well for you; but a poor artist, very extravagant, and deeply in debt, what a fate for me! Thank Heaven that he married me under the name of Hugo Brand, and that you discovered the affair in time to part us at the church door. I think that was the best piece of work you ever did in your life, Frith; but there, let us dismiss the subject from our minds, or you will be talking of it in your sleep."

And as the hansom had stopped before the door of Bently House any more conversation was impossible.

"You are in before your time, Miss Frith," said the servant who opened the door; "but Mrs. Julien will be very glad, as this moment there is a gentleman with her who has called to see Miss de Leon."

"It must be Valentine Eyre! There can be no other visitor for me," murmured Zitella, and hastening to her room she began rapidly to divest herself of the garments which were but a disguise to her radiant young beauty.

In a very few minutes she had donned a white dress with profuse trimmings of lace which lay in dainty ruffles on the throat and wrists, had fastened a string of amber beads round her neck, and some pale half-blown pink roses in her breast, and, thus attired, she glided noiselessly into the room where Mrs. Julien was sitting with Valentine Eyre.

"I am sure you cannot fail to be pleased with your ward; but you shall see her and judge for yourself. Ah! Zitella, my love, how you startled me; but I am glad to see you back so early. Mr. Eyre arrived in London this evening, and he has been here some hours."

Zitella came forward and placed a small cold hand in that of her guardian; but though her eyes were scarcely raised from the ground, she knew that the glance bent on her was one of unfeigned admiration, and in her heart she congratulated herself afresh on her escape from Hugo Bond.

"You have grown into a woman, Zitella!" said Valentine, but his tones were constrained; he scarcely could make up his mind whether he ought to be pleased or disappointed with the girl's coldness.

"Zitella has made marvellous progress during the three years of her stay here," said Mrs. Julien, graciously; and then with kindly tact she took her departure, leaving the guardian and ward alone together.

"You are so changed," murmured Zitella, looking up at her companion with the timid air which she knew so well how to assume.

"And you are also changed," replied Valentine, thinking more of the girl's sweet voice than his own words. "You have had enough of schools?" he queried, briefly.

"I think I have learned all that they can teach me, but," sighing, "the last of school means the end of home to me. I do not know what my future may be, but I am not afraid. Mrs. Julien will be sure to help me to get work. I know I could stay on here as a teacher, but I long for a wider sphere."

"Zitella, have you spoken of this to Mrs. Julien?" asked Valentine, anxiously.

"No, I should not have done so without consulting you, and your last letters hinted at a speedy return from Spain."

"That was quite right. Now, child, drop the subject for ever. How could you be so silly, knowing that your future was my care?"

"Do you mean to let me live with you and Mrs. Eyre?" questioned Zitella, looking up into her companion's face in a childish, trustful way.

Valentine frowned and bit his lip, and when he spoke his voice was a little harsh.

"There is no Mrs. Eyre," he said, shortly. "I have been a widower for the past three years, Zitella," he added, hastily, "I shall make some plans for your future, but not to-night, you look pale and weary. I will bid you good-night! Sleep well, my child!"

He took her hand, pressed, and dropped it, then bent as if to touch her brow with his lips, but restraining the impulse, he hurried from the room without another word.

That night Zitella stood long at the window of her bedroom, which looked out on Regent's Park.

She knew that Valentine Eyre loved her, but the knowledge did not cause her a faster breath. Zitella's heart was as cold as if it had been beating for a hundred years, but she shuddered when she recalled the folly by which she had very nearly marred all the chances of her own life.

But the ball was at her feet now. She felt that the moulding of her future lay in her own hands, and determined that that future should be dazzlingly brilliant, she stood there coldly and deliberately forming her plans.

She would not engage herself to Valentine Eyre, but she would encourage him to hope, and meanwhile he should find her a home with Lady Fitzroy or some other woman of rank and fashion.

Zitella had a vivid imagination. She pictured herself being presented at Court, and becoming the queen of a season. Earls, marquesses, and dukes would crowd around her, and she would take her choice of the best, and Valentine Eyre was to be whistled down the wind without another thought.

And through the long night Valentine lay awake at his hotel, seeing only one face, whose loveliness exceeded all his imaginings, and whose bright youth seemed a mockery to his weary and world-worn appearance.

At an early hour on the following day Valentine called and found Zitella awaiting him.

The girl looked even lovelier than she had looked on the previous night. The hard course of study which she had undergone for the last three years had impaired neither her health nor her beauty, for, combined with a form graceful as a sylph, rose the strength of a young Amazon.

"This is a holiday!" said Zitella, as she greeted her guardian, "and as all the others are out we shall be quite undisturbed as long as you can stay."

"I am glad of that," replied Valentine, "for we have much to talk of. Zitella, I have been thinking of your future. You know, my child, that I have no female relations."

"There is Lady Fitzroy who brought me over to England."

"She is not a relation."

"No; but she is an old friend, and for your sake she would gladly receive me into her house, because she is very fond of you."

Valentine's face flushed crimson at this suggestion. He bit his lip in silence for a moment, and when he spoke his words came slowly.

"When you came to me three years ago the case was urgent. I did not stay to think, but now it is different. I could not ask Lady Fitzroy to undertake your charge

without confiding to her your real name and station."

"You are generous," murmured Zitella, her face and lips becoming livid. She seemed to struggle for a few moments with her emotion, and then turning hid her face in her hands.

"Oh! this is cruel to have taken me from my old life for this, from the freedom, the happy innocence—"

"Zitella!"

At the utterance of her name the girl regained her composure and drew herself up haughtily.

"Leave me," she said, in imperious tones, and Valentine obeyed her without another word.

But outside the closed door he felt that he must see her again and heal the wound which his words had made. And yielding to the irresistible longing he turned the handle softly and re-entered the apartment on noiseless feet.

He found Zitella in an attitude which at once betokened the profound humiliation her proud spirit had undergone.

She had heard Valentine's irresolute pause on the other side of the door, and faint as was the sign which there escaped him, it had reached her quick ears.

As the handle of the door turned, she sank to the floor beside a wide low chair, whose seat provided a support for her arms, and on these her lovely head was bowed, while sobs shook her slender frame and passionate words broke from her lips—words that were each as deadly sword thrusts in the heart of him on whose ear they fell.

"Oh! cruel, cruel fate," wept Zitella, "that I must leave him who cares not for me! Oh! that I could efface the last three years, and yet how sweet they were. To win his approval was my hope, his love my dream. Oh, Heaven, what folly! but I love him. I gave my life for him once, and would again."

Valentine felt that he could hear no more. One movement, a sudden turn of the girl's head, might betray his presence, and how bitter would be her humiliation in the knowledge that her heart's secret had been overheard.

Were he to reveal his love now Zitella would not be convinced that he spoke out of aught but pity. So, for her sake, he controlled the natural impulse of his heart and left the room in silence.

Zitella heard him go, and waited until the length of the hall outside was between her and the retreating footsteps. Then, rising from her crouching position, and looking like a panther about to spring, she vowed to be revenged on Valentine Eyre. He had thwarted her design, had disappointed her dearest hopes—at least, so Zitella thought, in the heat of her passionate, unreasoning anger. She looked at Valentine as some malign enemy, who had wilfully crossed her plans; and she was determined to deal him such punishment as her hatred could inspire.

Her disappointment was bitter, too bitter for words or tears.

Here she was helpless and alone, further almost from the world than she had been in her forest home, for without Valentine's aid what could she do? And Valentine had told her that she being a nameless waif was not fit to mix with his fine friends; so in her fierce anger Zitella construed her guardian's words until they were magnified into the most cruel and pitiless insults. As one by one the cherished hopes of years fell away from her a madness of despair seized her wayward heart. She felt like one who suffocates for want of air.

Heavens! the room was stifling. She was choking! She put her hands to her throat,

rending away the dainty covering of lace, then, in a wilder paroxysm of grief, rushed to the window. As she flung it open with nervous haste, she saw the garden-gate opened by a vagrant, who came slowly up the path. Something in the woman's walk seemed to touch a chord in Zitella's memory. She looked again, and a low cry of terror broke from her lips, for the woman had suddenly lifted her head, and in the dark, bronzed visage Zitella imagined she recognised Zanoni, her gipsy foster-mother.

"If it is her—if it should be!" gasped the girl, shrinking back in wild terror, but not before the vagrant had caught a glimpse of her. "And if so, what hope is there for me? What can have brought her here but to wreak vengeance on me. Oh, Heaven! perhaps Hermann—"

It was added terror which checked the flow of Zitella's thoughts, for Zanoni had approached the window, and was holding out her shrivelled hand imploring a coin. Then their glances met, and Zitella began to breathe freely, and almost to smile at her folly as she saw she had been mistaken. No gleam of recognition was in the woman's wild, dark eyes. It was not Zanoni! She was about to order the gipsy away sharply, when a sudden thought flashed through her mind, and wild and improbable as it was, she determined to act upon it.

Beckoning the woman forward Zitella placed some coins in her out-stretched hand, and checked the voluble flow of thanksgiving by saying in tongue which she had not used for three years,—

"You are a gipsy; you come from Spain; do not be afraid to confide in me. I also am Spanish, and I love your people."

"Roumania was my birthplace," replied the woman sadly, but we know no dwelling-place, and Spain has been as much my home as any other land. My son and I have been in England for the past year; how we came, or why, does not matter, but we have been here too long. I yearn to get back to my own land, that I may die there; but it is a wild, vain dream. Where should I find the money! You are the first who has shown me any mercy."

"I feel with you," replied Zitella in her gentlest tones. "We have kindred passions, but you must not despair of your desire. More wonderful things have happened. How much would you require to take you and your son back to your birthland?"

The vagrant named a sum, and Zitella replied eagerly,—

"You shall have this sum, twice as much, if you will name some spot near this in which we may meet to-night and talk without fear of disturbance. I also have a heart's desire, in which you may help me without injury to yourself. I know," she added quickly, "that you have the art of divination, and I want you to reveal my future to me."

"I will not fail you, sweet lady," replied the gipsy; and then with muttered words that sounded like a blessing on her benefactor the gipsy turned away and passed down the garden path.

At that moment Valentine re-entered the room, and with a sweet, sad smile the girl beckoned him to her side. She drew his attention to the retreating form of the vagrant, and raised her dark eyes, suffused with tears, to his face.

"A link of my old life," she murmured. "That poor creature is a gipsy, my foster-mother. She came just now to the window asking alms; and though I knew her she did not appear to know me; but she looked at me with such a strange, guilty, fearful look. Perhaps I shall see her again."

Valentine heard little of what his companion was saying. He was absorbed in his

own thoughts, thoughts of his love and the beauty of the face into which he was gazing; but when Zitella paused he took her hand.

"My child, you sent me away in anger just now. You misunderstood me; and because I cannot bear to be estranged from you I have come back to say—"

"Ah! say nothing now," interrupted Zitella, feverishly.

She had withdrawn her hand from Valentine's, and veiled with it her excited face.

"Say nothing," she repeated, with a sob.

"I was all to blame. I would have tempted you to deceive your friends for my sake. I wonder, now, that I had so little pride. But you need fear no more; I will be Zitella the gipsy once more."

"You will be, Zitella, my love, as you have ever been—my world!"

And as he spoke Valentine endeavoured to encircle the slender form with a lover's tender arm, but resolutely Zitella drew herself away.

"Oh, no," she answered, with a convulsive sob. "You forget all that lies between you and me. Remember I am but a gipsy."

"I remember it," cried Valentine, passionately, with pride and joy, "Zitella, my queen, my darling!"

"Oh, hush!" was the pleading interposition. "Say no more, at least, not now; wait until to-morrow. I feel as if I stood on the brink of a revelation. I feel as if to-morrow would make a great change in my life."

"Who do you think, Blanche, has been to see me while you were out riding?"

"Mr. Valentine Eyre?"

"Oh, you little witch! But, of course, you have had the news from Peters or Jeanette, my maid."

"I assure you, Lady Fitzroy, that I have not seen either Peters or Jeanette; but Captain Lister, whom I met in the Row this afternoon, told me that Mr. Eyre had returned, and I thought it likely that he would remember his old friend."

Lady Fitzroy smiled at her young friend's explanation, and then said, in a musing tone,—

"Valentine Eyre did remember me, but I cannot say that the object of his visit was entirely disinterested. He came to ask me a favour."

"Then he must be greatly changed from the Valentine of five years ago," replied Blanche Hastings, in a decided tone.

"He is greatly changed. The cynic is merged into the lover."

"You astonish me, Lady Fitzroy!"

"It is true, my dear Blanche. Our marble Valentine has fallen in love, and in a most romantic way, with a waif of his adoption, whom he now desires me to receive into my household that she may be presented to society under the most favourable auspices."

"Who is this girl?" asked Blanche Hastings, with languid interest.

"You remember a child whom I brought from Spain three years ago?"

"I fancy I heard you speak of her at the time; the orphan of a Spanish nobleman?"

"So I thought; but that story was not true. Valentine found the child among some gipsies; and, attracted by her beauty, conceived the idea of sending her to England to be educated. Now, at the most critical time of the girl's life, her real name and birth is revealed. It seems," continued Lady Fitzroy, "that Zitella is the only child of an Austrian noble, Count Sofreska by name, and the last of her distinguished race."

"The count, being suspected of some conspiracy against the government, his property was seized, and his life threatened,

when, to avoid capture, he fled into exile, leaving his child, with money and jewels, in the care of a nurse whom he deemed faithful."

"The nurse loved her charge, but she had a gipsy lover, for whose sake she converted the count's jewels into money, and fled to Spain with the child, which she refused to abandon. So Zitella grew up among the gipsies until she was found and rescued by Valentine Eyre."

"A most romantic story if only it were true," remarked Blanche Hastings; "but who is to prove its truth?"

"It has been already proved beyond a doubt," replied Lady Fitzroy, "for this gipsy Zanoni, is now in London, with proofs of Zitella's parentage; the other day she saw and recognised her foster child, whom she afterwards identified in the presence of Valentine Eyre."

"This young girl is very beautiful?" asked Blanche, in a tone whose forced indifference could not mask the burning jealousy which prompted the question.

"If she has fulfilled the promise of her childhood she will be the most dazzling star that has ever risen on a London season. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when it is announced that she is engaged to her guardian. I am only sorry," continued Lady Fitzroy, "that I did not see more of Miss Sofreska during the past three years, but society has so many demands."

"And for the future this new beauty will have so many that I shall be nowhere in your esteem."

Lady Fitzroy looked up at her friend with a smile and a few words of remonstrance.

"My dear Blanche, if I did not know you a lovely woman and one conscious of your own loveliness, I should say that you were envious of Miss Sofreska."

"Two stars move not in one sphere," quoted Blanche, with a sneer; "but I suppose I have had my season, and must submit to be eclipsed," she added, lightly, as she gathered up her riding hat and gloves and swept from the room.

"How odd Blanche is sometimes," mused Lady Fitzroy, when she was left alone. "She is so beautiful that whatever new star arises she may always command her own court, and certainly envy or jealousy is a new phase of her character. I always thought her too cold for such an emotion."

While Blanche Hastings, as she passed up the tapestry hung stairs to her own apartments, murmured through set teeth,—

"To think that five years a meaningless look, a light word, should have kindled a fire which to-day burns clearer than ever. Oh, Heaven! to think that I should have sighed in vain for a love which has been freely lavished on another—Zitella!"

She broke off suddenly, catching her breath in a sob, as she reached her corridor, and encountered the astonished face of her maid, who had never seen her beautiful young mistress so agitated before.

(To be continued next week.)

MARRIAGE

Thou art my own, my darling and my wife;
And when we pass into another life,
Still thou art mine. All this which now we see

Is but the childhood of Eternity;
And thou and I, through trials and through tears,

The joys and sorrows of our earthly years,
Are growing up into a single soul,
God's workmanship; a clear completed whole

Made out of twain. Our love is but begun:
Forever and forever, we are one.

A. B.

TWICE CHOSEN.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A VILE PLOT.

THE following morning the Duchess was up unusually early for her, and she went to Lady Lynestone's bedroom to say good-bye.

Before starting, she had laughingly begged Lord Carruthers to take care of the young widow, and not to let the Marchese scare her with his admiration.

A peculiar smile crossed his Lordship's face.

"If needs be I think I can silence him," he answered, somewhat vaguely.

"Indeed! How?"

"At present with a name only. Later I hope to do so with something more substantial and satisfactory."

"You know something against him then?"

"I do."

"Then, Lord Carruthers, he should not be a guest in our house. You must confide your secret to the Duke."

"I fully intend to do so, but not before I can prove what I state. When shall you be back, Duchess? I shall not leave the house till you return."

"About three, or, stay, I will come back to luncheon at two if I find it possible. In the meantime, *au revoir*. I leave you 'on guard.' Don't let anyone run away with my little Countess," and with a friendly nod she walked towards the door.

"Are you off now? Then let me see you to your carriage," and he followed her out into the Hall.

Lord Carruthers was pale, and there were unusual lines of thought upon his brow.

He had had a wakeful night, and what little sleep he had obtained was fitful and restless.

When he went out the night before to watch the woman he had seen loitering about at the door of the Duke's mansion, he had scarcely got outside the house when a hansom dashed up, and the Marchese sprang to the ground, and, having paid the fare, was raising his hand to the medieval bell-pull when a detaining one was laid upon his arm.

"Carlo! for the love of Heaven, stop!" pleaded a woman's voice, in a pretty, broken accent. "I will not lead the life of a dog, while you follow one of enjoyment and luxury. You will find that even a worn will turn if you torture it too far."

"What, another scene, Marie! What things you women are!" he cried, impatiently. "Am I not working for your good as well as my own?"

"My good!" she laughed bitterly; "you have always thought of that! My good, that you should make love to another woman!"

"Bah! jealous! If you play the part I have set you properly, you will never lack money or fine dresses again. You must swear to every word of my story, my little sister!"

"Your sister!" she retorted, scornfully. "Carlo, if I loved you as once I did, before you had killed my devotion, you would scarcely have dared to thus ask me to help you to marry another woman; but as it is—"

She broke off suddenly with a pathetic wall in her voice.

"As it is," he repeated, coldly.

"Our Lady help me, I hate you."

"All the better," he returned, with a cruel smile. "I shall pay you well for your services, and the account between us will be settled."

She covered her wan face with her hands, then suddenly let them drop with a gesture of despair, and looked at him.

"And once you loved me passionately, Carlo. Do you remember, many years ago, when disgrace fell upon you, who it was that shielded you? I was pure as a summer morning then, Heaven knows, but I gave up my reputation to save your life. You could not have been the man who robbed and murdered the young French nobleman; of course not, when you had passed the night with Marie Paraviso. She loved you with an insane worship of you, and your Heaven-born art. You knew it, and asked this sacrifice of her love, promising to repay it with a life of devotion. She swore to it in the court, with cheeks tingling with shame, and blushes which but confirmed her story. Some men would have died willingly rather than expose a guilty mistress. But there are few who would have bought freedom at the price of an innocent woman's honour. Her father was a Roman, and could not brook disgrace. He cast her off, and died of a broken heart! She has much to thank you for, Carlo Cavenci!"

"Hush!" he said, uneasily. "Go home, and I will call upon you to-morrow afternoon. By then I shall know when you will be wanted."

"Home!" she repeated. It is mockery, to give it such a name."

"Mockery, or no mockery, you had better go! I cannot waste any more time talking to you."

She laughed a low, vindictive laugh.

"You might find it no waste of time to be civil, Carlo; but as it is—Addio!"

He turned and took her hand.

"Don't speak like that, Marie. I mean to behave handsomely to you when I have the money to do so. You may trust me; good-night. Move away, Cara, before I ring."

She obeyed him, and paused behind the very portico under the shadow of which Lord Carruthers was standing hidden.

"Trust him!" she moaned. "It would be as well to trust the restless and uncertain sea. Why should I stain my soul with a new lie for his sake? He can but murder me if I refuse. And if he did? What has my life been that I should preserve it? Oh; if I had but one friend to whom I could turn; only one to advise me, and help me to a better life, where his tyranny could not reach me!"

Lord Carruthers moved, and she started like a timid deer, and was turning away, when he spoke to her in a kind voice.

"Do you want a friend?" he asked.

"Who would be one to me in a strange land?" she answered, wearily.

"Perhaps I can help you, who knows?"

"You!"

"Yes! I have heard all that passed between you and that man; and I was in Italy when it all happened. So I know what you said was true."

"You are too young; you cannot remember it."

"I was but a lad, but I was in Court when you gave that evidence which saved Carlo Cavenci's life."

A great trembling seized upon her, and she clung to the postern for support.

"Poor girl!" he said, gently. "I wish I could ask you in to rest; but this is not my house, and I cannot. Come, take my arm, and let me walk part of the way home with you. What is your relationship, really, to Cavenci?"

"I am his wife!"

"Can you prove that? Have you the certificate of your marriage?" he asked eagerly.

"No, but I can give you the names of the

priest who united us, and of the church where we were wedded, if you like."

He stopped under the light of a street lamp, and entered both upon a tablet, which he took from his pocket for that purpose.

"And now," he said, kindly, "in gratitude for the information you have given me, let me help you. Would you like to have a quiet home with a good woman, where that black-hearted villain can never molest you?"

She turned up to his, a white wondering face, and he continued,—

"When I was a boy I had a governess who was very fond of me, and my father pensioned her for her lifetime. She lives in a tiny cottage within my park gates. She would receive you if I asked her."

"And you would ask her?" she demanded in astonishment.

"Yes, Yours was a noble sacrifice, and it has been ill rewarded. You spoke of Cavenci requiring another lie of you. Will you tell me what it is?"

"I will!" she answered, after a pause. "Do you know what he is trying to do now?"

"I believe I do. He is endeavouring to get a young and rich widow into his power."

"That is it; and he wants me to help him."

"How?"

"I am to state that I am his sister, and that Lord Lynestone married me privately in Italy but not being happy with him I ran away, and let others tell him of my death; but that, being still alive, the Countess had never had any claim to the title of wife, nor right to the property left to her for herself or her son."

"But the certificates! he could not produce them!"

"Could he not? Carlo can accomplish anything upon which he has set his mind, and all priests are not above being bribed!"

"What a vile plot!" he cried, passionately. "Signora, you will not lend yourself to it?"

"If I cross him, do you know what will happen?"

"No."

Marie Cavenci will be seen and heard of no more."

"You will be perfectly safe with my friend."

"Should I?" she asked eagerly. "And is this lady he is pursuing a friend of yours?"

"A very great friend."

"Then I will never say it, for your sake, for you have spoken kindly to me. He can but kill me!"

"Poor girl! It is too late to find you a place of refuge to-night, but early to-morrow I will provide you a safe asylum, and in a few days you shall go to a permanent home. Give me your present address, and pack up whatever you desire to bring away with you, but let it be only what you can carry, and tell no one at your lodging that you are going away, for doubtless they are all the creatures of Cavenci. Go out at eight o'clock to-morrow morning, and at the end of the street you will see a four-wheeler cab. Follow it, and you will find me in it. Do not keep me waiting, as I must be back here at nine o'clock. Cavenci must not miss me from the breakfast-table. When he seeks you in the afternoon he will find his bird flown! Do you understand my plan?"

"Yes, and I am more than grateful to you, Signore. No one knows what I have suffered; it is time it ended."

"Quite time; and no other woman shall fall a victim to him if I can help it. And

now farewell, I must return to the house, as I am keeping the servants up. At eight to-morrow, remember."

"At eight, and Heaven and Our Lady bless you."

The butler was waiting for Lord Carruthers, and admitted him at once, and was well rewarded for his vigil.

"Is Hervoy up?" inquired his lordship, referring to his own valet.

"Yes, my lord; he is waiting for you."

"Then send him to my room at once," and Lord Carruthers went upstairs with rapid strides. He was elated at having so easily discovered all he desired to know.

"He said he would tell her to-morrow," he soliloquized; "he must have ascertained that the Duchess is going out; but, never mind, I will be upon the spot."

His man entered, and he desired him to call him at seven o'clock punctually, and to have a four-wheeler cab at the door by a quarter-past, but to make no comments upon his movements to the servants in the house; then he dismissed him to bed, and was glad to be alone.

"Poor Adela!" he said, after a pause of thoughtful reflection. "Poor girl! I would to Heaven I could help her in her trouble. If only she had not told me of her love for that other, I would yet again have offered her the shelter of my care. If she has got over it, her heart might even now turn to me." Then arose in his mind the question whether he really loved her still?

The hope and passion had died out of his heart little by little. Was what remained really love?

He was unable to answer the query which he raised. He had believed himself to be not only true, but steadfast in his attachment to Adela; and now, between the memory of her face and his, floated another image—that of Rosamond, the young widow Countess of Lynestone.

"No, no! I shall ever love Adela!" he answered, impatiently. "I will see her again, and she will be as dear to me as ever; and yes, I will ask her once more to be my wife;" and, having so determined, he seemed better satisfied with himself.

But it was of Rosamond he dreamed in his fitful, uncertain sleep.

Punctually at seven he was called, and after making a hurried toilet, hastened downstairs as noiselessly as possible. The cab was at the door, he jumped in. On his way he stopped at a respectable looking house, though certainly not in a fashionable neighbourhood, and, getting out, knocked at the door, which was quickly opened by a neat-looking elderly woman.

"Lor's a mercy, my lord, only to think of seeing you so early!" she cried, in unfeigned astonishment.

"Yes, I am early, Mrs. Rawlins; I want your help."

"And that you shall have, my Lord; there's nothing as you can ask, to which I'd say no, having served the late dear lord for thirty years, and owing the roof over my head to his generosity."

"I felt sure you would assist me," he said, with a kindly smile. "Have you two nice rooms vacant?"

"And that I have—the first floor."

"Then I'll engage them at once, and I want the tenant to come in within an hour."

"Dearie me! Well, everything is clean and tidy, so I've no call to raise objections."

"The lady who I shall bring here is very little known to me, but she is in great trouble, and I want you to be kind to her."

"Lor, sir! your're always helping someone; and that I will, with pleasure!"

"And don't talk about her to your

friends and neighbours, if she seems at all strange."

"She ain't—" and Mrs. Rawlins touched her head suggestively.

"Not a bit, only in deep sorrow; and now I'm off. I will drive her here myself," and his lordship went briskly down the steps.

"He's a Carruthers," murmured the old woman, contentedly. "I need have no fear, they're good, every one of them, and if she was not all right, he would not bring her here; but I wouldn't have received a tenant at such short notice from anyone else," and Mrs. Rawlins, having dusted the rooms, laid the breakfast things and put the kettle on to boil, and tidied herself to receive the new arrival.

Signora Cavenei was waiting in the street when the cab drew up at the end of it, and hurried to the vehicle.

"No one is down yet," she whispered, as though fearful of being heard. "I have only brought this," placing a small leather bag upon the seat opposite. "He bought what few things I have, so I thought I had better leave them."

"Quite right. Miss Wheeler will see that you have all you need."

"Is that the name of your old governess?"

"Yes; and now I am going to take you for the present to our old cook, Mrs. Rawlins; Mrs. by courtesy," he laughed.

"May I know the name of my friend?" she asked, looking up at him.

"Carruthers," he returned, "and, Signora, I will be a friend to you."

She clasped his hand gratefully, and after a moment's hesitation pressed her lips to it. And he left her in Mrs. Rawlins' charge; and desiring that everything should be provided for her comfort, he promised to see her again ere long, and drove away as fast as the horse could carry him, arriving at the Duke's mansion in Park lane before nine.

He rushed upstairs to his room, and hastily refreshing himself with the cold bath he found prepared for him, arrayed himself in the clean linen, and clothes which his valet had placed ready to his hand, and was downstairs in the breakfast-room within a few minutes of the gong sounding.

The Marchese was already in the room, and Lord Carruthers received his maternal greeting with a cold bow, which was noted both by host and hostess.

Later, he had had the short conversation before mentioned with her Grace, when she came down ready for her start.

Then he wrote a note to Lady Lynestone, sealed it, gave it to the butler, and desired him to let her maid deliver it at once to her ladyship.

She received it with wonder, at first fearing it was from the Marchese, but her face relaxed into a smile as she turned to the signature. It was marked *private*, and ran thus,—

"DEAR LADY LYNESTONE,—

"The Marchese is in my power; do not fear him. It is better that he should expose his own villainy. Come down into the drawing-room as though you suspect nothing; he will soon join you. Remember, I shall be behind the screen and shall hear all he says, and be ready to protect you. Give him rope, and let him hang himself, and his persecution will be a thing of the past.—Yours sincerely,

"CARRUTHERS."

She read it a second time attentively, and smiled, then, dressing herself in her prettiest costume, descended to the drawing-room,

CHAPTER XXV.

"ON GUARD."

LADY LYNESTONE ensconced herself in a low easy chair, and drew from a pretty work-basket some dainty embroidery, and began to stitch leisurely, without once turning her face to the magnificent oriental screen at the further corner of the spacious apartment; but, nevertheless, her thoughts, if not her eyes, were centred upon the person it was hiding from her view.

How good he was to her! and if only he could really rid her of the presence of the absolutely hated Marchese, how glad she would be!

Not for the world would she thus risk meeting him, but for Lord Carruthers' written words. As it was, she was more than willing to trust herself to his guidance, and follow his advice. She had not long to wait.

The Italian came through the conservatory, singing an operatic air, in his rarely beautiful voice. Greatly as she disliked him, she paused to listen, her senses stirred by his wonderful power. He stood in the doorway, and saw the softened look upon her face, and smiled.

"My music pleases you, Contessa," he said, in a low voice; and walking to the piano he poured out what appeared to be his soul, in a passionate love-song; then suddenly he was at her side.

"Contessa!" he said, softly; "I sing for you; all I have sung is for you; no words, no melody, are too sweet to tell you how I love you! You need no telling; every woman knows she is beloved; but it is my pride and my pleasure to pour out my heart before you as water. Contessa, give me the joy of knowing that love has begotten love!" and he bent over, and looked into her eyes.

An indignant flush mounted to her cheek. "Marchese," she said, gravely; "I have given you no encouragement to address me thus; and more, I decline to listen to such words from you. You could never gain my affection, it is useless for you to try."

"Nay, sweet one, do not give a hasty judgment; you may see that it is better to have a friend and husband and protector, than to meet trouble alone."

"Trouble of course comes to all, but my good lord has shielded me from most cares by his kind thoughtfulness for me."

"Your good lord!" he echoed ironically.

"Did you really believe in him, Contessa?"

"Did I believe in him?" she repeated, looking him fully in the face; "most truly and firmly!"

"Poverina," he said, softly.

"I do not require your pity, Marchese di Riviera," she answered, proudly.

"Poor child! You do not know."

"Know what? If you have anything to say, say it."

"As you will," he replied, with a shrug of his shoulders, and drawing a chair to her side, he seated himself, and looked earnestly in her face.

"Did you believe Lord Lynestone to be a bachelor when you married him, Contessa?"

"A bachelor! Of course he was; a confirmed old bachelor. No one ever expected him to take a wife to dear old Lynestone," she said, with a smile.

"Yet he might have taken one there, had he chosen, some years before he took you to share his home, poor girl," he answered, compassionately.

"What do you mean?"

"Contessa, how can I bear to pain you, I who love you," he answered, with a foreign gesture.

"Pray do not spare my feelings."

"If I might—if I dared."

"I beg you will proceed."

"You do not know what you are asking, Contessa; Lord Lynestone had married before."

"Do you mean to tell me that my husband was a widower?"

"Alas! no! His wife, or rather widow, still lives."

"Of course she does; I am not afraid of my own shadow, Marchese," she laughed.

"Poor child! you laugh! Yet you never were his wife; my own sister was Lady Lynestone, and she is yet alive."

"Your sister! Oh! there must be some great mistake."

"Not so; he married her in Rome, and she is now in town to claim her name and property, if I will let her. You and your boy are nameless and penniless, poverina! Now do you think I love you, Rosamond, or no?"

"If this were all true I should acknowledge the fact of your affection, however ill-placed it might be," she answered gravely.

"My darling!" he continued, taking her unwilling hand; "my sister shall never breathe this sad secret, never throw a shadow over your fair name, nor ruin the future of your bright-eyed boy. Give me the right to protect you, and I will do so with my life."

"My hand is then the price of your silence?"

"It is."

"Marchese," she said, rising and drawing herself up proudly. "If the title and property are your sister's, nothing would induce me to do her the great wrong of retaining them. Neither my fair fame, nor my boy's future, could tempt me to commit so gross an act of injustice. Let your sister prove her right, and I will give up my claims without a murmur."

"Brave woman!" whispered Lord Carruthers in his hiding-place.

"And you care nothing what the world will say of you?"

"Nothing!"

"Rosamond, you shall not thus sacrifice yourself. I will protect you in spite of your wishes," and he flung his arm about her.

"Don't touch me, sir," she cried, indignantly. "Am I to be insulted in her grace's drawing-room?"

"No," answered a voice.

The Marchese di Riviera, or Carlo Cavenci, started, and in another moment he and Lord Carruthers stood face to face.

"Coward and liar!" cried his lordship, with flashing eyes.

"Such words to a Roman nobleman!" blustered the Italian. "Your lordship shall answer for each one."

"I will, with a horsewhip!" returned the other coldly. "If you are not out of this house, bag and baggage, in a quarter of an hour."

"Are you its master?"

"I am yours, Carlo Cavenci. I was in court when you were tried for robbery and murder, and when you bought your wretched life at the expense of a woman's honour. Maria Paraviso was a noble sacrifice, and you have generously repaid it. Go, and never let me see your face again, or you may regret the day you crossed my path. The whole vile tale you have woven to bend the Countess to your will, is a tissue of lies. You have no sister, but you have a wife, whom you have left to pine in a low lodging-house, among coarse and brutal people, unfit to come near a refined woman. If you take my advice you will leave England before worse comes of it."

He crossed the room and rang the bell.

"Call a cab for this person," he said, indicating the Italian to the butler, "and

let him have what assistance you can to get him away as soon as possible."

The well-trained servant let no surprise appear in his face. He bowed, and held the door open for Carlo Cavenci to pass out.

The man stood like a stag at bay. He knew that the game was up.

For one moment he let his eyes rest with a bitter hatred upon that other who had defeated all his plans.

"We may meet again," he muttered through his clenched teeth, and turned from the room without another word.

"He will trouble you no more, Lady Lynestone," said Lord Carruthers, kindly; "but I fear, as it is, he has scared you, notwithstanding my warning," and he took her hand, and led her to a seat.

"Oh! Lord Carruthers! what a dreadful creature! I am afraid of him, and that's a fact. What did he mean by saying such awful things?"

"His words meant that he is both a ruffian and an imposter. He wished to frighten you into marrying him, by this bogey of his own wicked invention; for there is not a word of truth in anything that he has said. The story of Lord Lynestone's former union is as false as his pretended love for you. Bah! the word is not fit to come from his lying lips. I am thankful I came here, and that I have been able to unmask him, for had I not done so he might have given you real trouble. If he had told you this cruel tale, and you had believed him, and consented to keep it a secret, goodness knows where the evil would have stopped. He would have had you in his power."

The Countess shivered.

"I hope I should have had the strength of mind to tell him to do his worst; but who can tell?" she added, in a low voice.

Then she lifted her eyes to his, and stretched out her hand to him.

"You have been a real friend to me, Lord Carruthers! I shall ever be grateful for your kindness, and I hope we shall know more of each other."

"I sincerely reciprocate your sentiment," he answered, as he pressed her hand affectionately; "and if ever I'm in the vicinity of Lynestone I shall claim the privilege of a friend, and call upon you."

"Will you come to Lynestone and stay?" she inquired, warmly. "The Duchess has promised to pay me a visit shortly, and if you will accompany her I shall be more than glad."

"Do you mean it?" he asked, after a thoughtful pause.

"Yes; indeed, a hearty welcome will await you, if you do not object to the dulness of the dear old place. But I can offer you good shooting, and fishing, and hunting too, if you are fond of the sport."

"Then I will come," he said, decidedly. "If her grace will accept me as an escort. But mind," he added, with a smile, "it is neither the shooting, fishing, nor hunting which has tempted me, but the desire to improve a friendship pleasantly begun."

"Really?"

"And truly!" Then silence fell between them and she took up her fancy work, that woman's refuge upon all awkward occasions. She was the first to speak.

"How surprised our host and hostess will be to find their guest gone?" she said, with a smile.

"And glad, too, I am sure."

"I am certain of that; they never liked him."

"And yet they invited him to their house! Oh! society, society!"

"Yes; society is very hollow; people never pause to judge for themselves what men or women are. They are received everywhere, is answer enough, however bad they may be."

"In fact it is a case of one fool makes many."

"That is just it; I have enjoyed my peep at the bright world, but I should not care to live in it; there is too much glare and glitter, and too little sincerity and reality. I am happier in quiet, grand old Lynestone. The trees suit me better than the lamp-posts; the curseys of my poor tenants than the bows of the 'upper ten'; and the deer in the park than the brilliant carriages in the 'Row.' You see I was not born to it, Lord Carruthers, and it is all new to a girl in the middle class of life. My father was an officer, it is true, but he was a poor man; and, moreover, he and my mother were not happy together, and they parted; so I really never saw him. They were both too proud ever to seek a reunion. Of course each thought the other to blame. It always is so in domestic troubles, I suppose."

"And always will be; but it was sad for you."

"Yes. We had rather a bad time of it. My mother's family were rich, but they lost all their money, and during my girlhood we were very poor; in fact, my dear mother really worked herself to death. My father was Lord Lynestone's private secretary for many years, and when he died he begged his lordship to seek us out, and befriend us. You know how he came to marry me," she ended, with a smile, and a bright upward glance.

"I am certain of one thing," he answered earnestly.

"And that is?"

"That he never regretted it," and once again silence reigned.

"I hope I am not in your way," he said at length, "but I promised the Duchess to remain 'on guard' until her return."

"On the other hand, I fear I am wasting your valuable time," she returned, "but I appreciate being looked after, I can assure you."

"Then I will remain without hesitation, the more pleased to have your companionship, knowing that duty calls me away this afternoon."

"So soon?" she asked, with an evident look of disappointment.

"Yes! we must not always consider our own pleasure, you know, and we shall meet again at Lynestone."

"I am very glad," she said; then suddenly looking up, she asked if he minded children.

"No, I am very fond of them," he answered truthfully.

"Perhaps you won't object to my boy's company too," she laughed; "for I promised to have him down to sit with me, and I never like to break my word to him."

"Quite right," said his lordship, rising. "May I ring the bell for you to order him to be brought downstairs?"

"Will you? Thank you very much."

So when the Duchess returned at a quarter to two, she looked in upon a very pretty picture.

The little fellow was seated comfortably upon Lord Carruthers' knee, holding his hand confidently, and his blue eyes upturned to his kindly face, listening to some wonderful fairy tale which he was inventing or repeating for his amusement, while the young Countess paused in her work to listen too, scarcely less interested than the child.

"A pretty picture of home life," cried the Duchess. Fact had spoiled Fiction.

The thread of the story was broken; they all three had to return from fairy land to every day life.

Lady Lynestone sighed.

"Is that all?" asked the boy.

dominating all, as she read the lines on the paper in her hand.

"You will be surprised to hear from me," the letter ran; "but I am in London again and want to see you. I am in debt and difficulties as usual, only that I have gone a little deeper in the mire this time; but it is not to pour out my troubles that I seek an interview. I must tell you something which, if you are sensible, you will take as the best news you could hear.

"I shall look for you between eight and nine, and remember the old address. H.B."

It would be impossible to depict the flood of evil passion which swept over Zitella's face as she read these lines. Even with them, the proof of her mad folly, before she could scarcely believe that she, with her own hand, had a year ago wilfully destroyed her own ambitious designs, swept away the splendid fabric of worldly success and honour which, from the day on which she first met Valentine Eyre, she had stendily woven for the future. As these thoughts passed through her mind her anger at herself was so great that she forgot all caution and exclaimed aloud:—

"Oh that I could have been so mad, so foolish! I cannot believe it! It seems like some dream, that I could have been cajoled by a few loving words, a few empty flatteries, into marriage with a penniless young man!"

Zitella shuddered and dropped her hands in her lap, her own madness seemed like some horrible dream to her. She found added bitterness in the fact that at that moment her pocket contained a letter in which Valentine Eyre breathed a hope of soon returning to England.

"Oh, that he had returned a year ago!" was Zitella's frantic thought. "But it would go hard with her," she thought, "if she had to forego all for which she had waited so long and worked so well."

She would not forego it. To-night she determined she would make some desperate struggle for freedom. She would appeal to Hugo to set her free from a marriage which was no more than a foolish freak. She did not think Hugo would need much persuasion, for she had, in spite of her folly, been only too careful to avoid all mention of Valentine Eyre.

Her spirits rose in the prospects of success, and she went indoors smiling as she thought how cleverly she had deceived Mrs. Julien with the passage which she had pretended to read from her guardian's letter.

Zitella gloried in her clever deceptions and falsehoods, though sometimes she was inclined to acknowledge that such courses were dangerous and must be given up when her worldly success was established. She thought when her goal was once reached it would be easy to purify herself from all the mud she had gathered by the way.

Immediately after dinner Zitella went away in a hansom with Miss Frith, a governess who had been at Bently House for ten years, and who was greatly trusted by Mrs. Julien.

"Number nine, York-street," had been the address which the parlour-maid at Bently House was ordered to give the driver; but when they got to Baker-street the man was ordered to drive to a house in the neighbourhood of St. James's Park, after which Miss Frith shrank back in the hansom, cowering and trembling in every limb as if in terror of pursuit or discovery, while Zitella sat bolt upright, looking straight before her with languid indifference to all that was passing around, for, complaining of a slight cold, the girl, before setting out, had donned a black frock and a hood, which concealed every vestige of her hair from view; a winter cloak and thick

veil completed her attire, and rendered recognition impossible.

The silence was unbroken until their destination was reached, when the door of a quiet house being opened the pair entered; and leaving her companion in the hall, Zitella passed upstairs to a room, whose sole occupant was a handsome young man who, stretched at careless length on a sofa, was filling the air with clouds of smoke.

On Zitella's entrance, however, the young man removed his meerschaum from between his very handsome lips, and hastily rising, advanced to meet his visitor with an abashed air which was in striking contrast to the girl's haughty bearing.

"So you've come," said the young man at last. He had planned to meet his young wife with a most affectionate address, but he was somewhat daunted by her chilling scorn.

"I am here in reply to your letter, Hugo," was Zitella's frigid reply; and then as if suspecting something unusual she darted at her companion a swift, lightning glance. His face told her that he had some weighty communication or daring proposition to make.

While she hesitated, wondering what sort of manner it would be best to adopt she heard Hugo say in an abrupt and rather nervous tone—

"Do you know that this is the anniversary of our wedding-day Zitella?"

"And so you sent for me that you might celebrate it!" was the sarcastic rejoinder.

Hugo drew his dark brows together in a frown. Zitella's words and manner galled him. He was accustomed to homage from women, and his vanity was easily piqued. If things had not been so desperate with him Zitella would have defeated her own object. Perhaps some idea of this entered her mind, for the next minute she said almost tenderly—

"It was an evil day for you, Hugo, when you burdened yourself with a penniless wife."

The frown passed from Hugo's face, and in its place came a crimson flush which mounted to the roots of his hair. Zitella's words, with their semblance of truth and tenderness, had touched his better nature made him almost loathe the dishonourable deed he was about to do; but, as if reading his very thoughts, Zitella, as she seated herself, said impatiently,—

"You must get this interview over quickly, Hugo. I had to scheme to come, and I have not long to stay; besides, Miss Frith is waiting downstairs."

"Confound Miss Frith!" burst from the young man's lips with savage energy. "If she had done her duty and taken proper care of you a year ago I should not have been able to deceive and befool you as I did. The truth is, Zitella," he went on, in a hurried, ashamed way, "I sent for you to-night to confess that our marriage was no marriage, and it was fortunate for you that your duenna woke up from her dream in time to part us at the church door, for you would never legally have been my wife. I married you under a feigned name, and it was no clergyman—"

He was interrupted by a cry from Zitella, who could scarcely conceal her exultation. Hugo, interpreting the sound to denote pain and anger, would have poured forth excuses and prayers for forgiveness, but he was again interrupted.

"What is your real name, Hugo Brand?" questioned Zitella, breathlessly; and without a moment's hesitation her husband replied,—

"Bond." Then with a laugh: "It is not a very distinguished name, so you see you did not lose very much by the exchange;

there's but the difference of one letter between the two."

"And you have no money, no connections?" asked Zitella, with a coldness which appalled her listener. Wild, selfish, good-for-nothing though he was, this girl's callousness was too much for him; however, he thought her attitude rendered any scruples on his part quite unnecessary. He need no longer shrink from the thought of deceiving her.

"I have neither money nor connections," he replied, sullenly, "so you see it will be better for you to help in cutting the past once for all."

Zitella's heart beat wildly. The game she had hardly hoped to win was being played into her hands. She could scarcely refrain from laughing aloud as she thought of it, but she was careful to let no gleam of joy appear on her face.

"I have been a fool!" she said at last, with feigned bitterness, "and I would that the record of my folly could be wiped out for ever."

"It is simply done," said Hugo. "We have but to agree to be strangers from this night forth—"

"I prefer a surer way," interrupted Zitella, drawing as she spoke a folded paper from her bosom. "This," she said, laying it before Hugo, "when signed by you will wipe out the past as it can possibly be wiped out. It is not likely," she added, coldly, "that either of us will ever wish to come together again; but it is well to be provided against all contingencies."

"What is it?" asked Hugo, as he glanced over the document.

"A statement proving that our marriage was not legally performed, and that when it was over we parted at the church door."

"With all my heart," said Hugo, as he rose from the sofa, and seizing a pen affixed his name to the statement which Zitella had drawn up.

"You have done wisely, my dear," was the young man's remark, as he handed back the document. "We were a pair of hot-headed young fools when we met at New Haugh last year; but twelve months have taught us wisdom, and we know that we can't live on air. I have not a penny, Zitella, for I have no rich relations, and not the smallest inclinations to work. In short, I am a good-for-nothing scamp, and it would be a vast pity for you to throw yourself away upon me."

"We part to-night for ever," replied Zitella, indifferently. Then, with a cold and hurried farewell, she left the room and hastened downstairs to communicate the news of her freedom to the unhappy Miss Frith, who, since her pupil's escapade at New Haugh, had lived with the constant fear of discovery suspended like a drawn sword over her head.

Zitella's footsteps had scarcely died away on the stairs before the man who called himself Hugo buried his face in the sofa pillow to smother the laughter which he could not suppress.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "I may congratulate myself on having got well out of the very worst mess I was ever in; but that Zitella should have been so anxious to get rid of me was the last thing I expected. I should feel piqued by her coldness, but that I am so happy in my release; and now for Eastshire, who knows nothing of my secret, and who, like a good brother, has promised once more to pay my debts."

As as they drove back to Regent's Park Zitella remarked to her companion,—

"Now I dare to breathe freely for the first time in twelve long months. This chapter in my life is turned down, cut out for ever. Hugo Brand will never trouble me again."

"You were very inconsiderate to me when you married him, Zitella," remarked Miss Frith, who could not forget that discovery of her pupil's folly would mean her ruin, because she had not looked better after her charge.

"But," rejoined Zitella, scornfully, "had Hugo Bond been the rich man I thought him, all would have been well for you; but a poor artist, very extravagant, and deeply in debt, what a fate for me! Thank Heaven that he married me under the name of Hugo Brand, and that you discovered the affair in time to part us at the church door. I think that was the best piece of work you ever did in your life, Frith; but there, let us dismiss the subject from our minds, or you will be talking of it in your sleep."

And as the hansom had stopped before the door of Bently House any more conversation was impossible.

"You are in before your time, Miss Frith," said the servant who opened the door; "but Mrs. Julien will be very glad, as this moment there is a gentleman with her who has called to see Miss de Leon."

"It must be Valentine Eyre! There can be no other visitor for me," murmured Zitella, and hastening to her room she began rapidly to divest herself of the garments which were but a disguise to her radiant young beauty.

In a very few minutes she had donned a white dress with profuse trimmings of lace which lay in dainty ruffles on the throat and wrists, had fastened a string of amber beads round her neck, and some pale half-blown pink roses in her breast, and, thus attired, she glided noiselessly into the room where Mrs. Julien was sitting with Valentine Eyre.

"I am sure you cannot fail to be pleased with your ward; but you shall see her and judge for yourself. Ah! Zitella, my love, how you startled me; but I am glad to see you back so early. Mr. Eyre arrived in London this evening, and he has been here some hours."

Zitella came forward and placed a small cold hand in that of her guardian; but though her eyes were scarcely raised from the ground, she knew that the glance bent on her was one of unfeigned admiration, and in her heart she congratulated herself afresh on her escape from Hugo Bond.

"You have grown into a woman, Zitella!" said Valentine, but his tones were constrained; he scarcely could make up his mind whether he ought to be pleased or disappointed with the girl's coldness.

"Zitella has made marvellous progress during the three years of her stay here," said Mrs. Julien, graciously; and then with kindly tact she took her departure, leaving the guardian and ward alone together.

"You are so changed," murmured Zitella, looking up at her companion with the timid air which she knew so well how to assume.

"And you are also changed," replied Valentine, thinking more of the girl's sweet voice than his own words. "You have had enough of schools?" he queried, briefly.

"I think I have learned all that they can teach me, but," sighing, "the last of school means the end of home to me. I do not know what my future may be, but I am not afraid. Mrs. Julien will be sure to help me to get work. I know I could stay on here as a teacher, but I long for a wider sphere."

"Zitella, have you spoken of this to Mrs. Julien?" asked Valentine, anxiously.

"No, I should not have done so without consulting you, and your last letters hinted at a speedy return from Spain."

"That was quite right. Now, child, drop the subject for ever. How could you be so silly, knowing that your future was my care?"

"Do you mean to let me live with you and Mrs. Eyre?" questioned Zitella, looking up into her companion's face in a childish, trustful way.

Valentine frowned and bit his lip, and when he spoke his voice was a little harsh.

"There is no Mrs. Eyre," he said, shortly. "I have been a widower for the past three years, Zitella," he added, hastily, "I shall make some plans for your future, but not to-night, you look pale and weary. I will bid you good-night! Sleep well, my child!"

He took her hand, pressed, and dropped it, then bent as if to touch her brow with his lips, but restraining the impulse, he hurried from the room without another word.

That night Zitella stood long at the window of her bedroom, which looked out on Regent's Park.

She knew that Valentine Eyre loved her, but the knowledge did not cause her a faster breath. Zitella's heart was as cold as if it had been beating for a hundred years; but she shuddered when she recalled the folly by which she had very nearly marred all the chances of her own life.

But the ball was at her feet now. She felt that the moulding of her future lay in her own hands, and determined that that future should be dazzlingly brilliant, she stood there coldly and deliberately forming her plans.

She would not engage herself to Valentine Eyre, but she would encourage him to hope, and meanwhile he should find her a home with Lady Fitzroy or some other woman of rank and fashion.

Zitella had a vivid imagination. She pictured herself being presented at Court, and becoming the queen of a season. Earls, marquesses, and dukes would crowd around her, and she would take her choice of the best, and Valentine Eyre was to be whistled down the wind without another thought.

And through the long night Valentine lay awake at his hotel, seeing only one face, whose loveliness exceeded all his imaginings, and whose bright youth seemed a mockery to his weary and world-worn appearance.

* * * * *

At an early hour on the following day Valentine called and found Zitella awaiting him.

The girl looked even lovelier than she had looked on the previous night. The hard course of study which she had undergone for the last three years had impaired neither her health nor her beauty, for, combined with a form graceful as a sylph, rose the strength of a young Amazon.

"This is a holiday!" said Zitella, as she greeted her guardian, "and as all the others are out we shall be quite undisturbed as long as you can stay."

"I am glad of that," replied Valentine, "for we have much to talk of. Zitella, I have been thinking of your future. You know, my child, that I have no female relations."

"There is Lady Fitzroy who brought me over to England."

"She is not a relation."

"No; but she is an old friend, and for your sake she would gladly receive me into her house, because she is very fond of you."

Valentine's face flushed crimson at this suggestion. He bit his lip in silence for a moment, and when he spoke his words came slowly.

"When you came to me three years ago the case was urgent. I did not stay to think, but now it is different. I could not ask Lady Fitzroy to undertake your charge

without confiding to her your real name and station."

"You are generous," murmured Zitella her face and lips becoming livid. She seemed to struggle for a few moments with her emotion, and then turning hid her face in her hands.

"Oh! this is cruel to have taken me from my old life for this, from the freedom, the happy innocence—"

"Zitella!"

At the utterance of her name the girl regained her composure and drew herself up haughtily.

"Leave me," she said, in imperious tones, and Valentine obeyed her without another word.

But outside the closed door he felt that he must see her again and heal the wound which his words had made. And yielding to the irresistible longing he turned the handle softly and re-entered the apartment on noiseless feet.

He found Zitella in an attitude which at once betokened the profound humiliation her proud spirit had undergone.

She had heard Valentine's irresolute pause on the other side of the door, and faint as was the sign which there escaped him, it had reached her quick ears.

As the handle of the door turned, she sank to the floor beside a wide low chair, whose seat provided a support for her arms, and on these her lovely head was bowed, while sobs shook her slender frame and passionate words broke from her lips—words that were each as deadly sword thrusts in the heart of him on whose ear they fell.

"Oh! cruel, cruel fate," wept Zitella, "that I must leave him who cares not for me! Oh! that I could efface the last three years, and yet how sweet they were. To win his approval was my hope, his love my dream. Oh, Heaven, what folly! but I love him. I gave my life for him once, and would again."

Valentine felt that he could hear no more, One movement, a sudden turn of the girl's head, might betray his presence, and how bitter would be her humiliation in the knowledge that her heart's secret had been overheard.

Were he to reveal his love now Zitella would not be convinced that he spoke out of aught but pity. So, for her sake, he controlled the natural impulse of his heart and left the room in silence.

Zitella heard him go, and waited until the length of the hall outside was between her and the retreating footsteps. Then, rising from her crouching position, and looking like a panther about to spring, she vowed to be revenged on Valentine Eyre. He had thwarted her design, had disappointed her dearest hopes—at least, so Zitella thought, in the heat of her passionate, unreasoning anger. She looked at Valentine as some malign enemy, who had wilfully crossed her plans; and she was determined to deal him such punishment as her hatred could inspire.

Her disappointment was bitter, too bitter for words or tears.

Here she was helpless and alone, further almost from the world than she had been in her forest home, for without Valentine's aid what could she do? And Valentine had told her that she being a nameless waif was not fit to mix with his fine friends; so in her fierce anger Zitella construed her guardian's words until they were magnified into the most cruel and pitiless insults. As one by one the cherished hopes of years fell away from her a madness of despair seized her wayward heart. She felt like one who suffocates for want of air.

Heavens! the room was stifling. She was choking! She put her hands to her throat,

rending away the dainty covering of lace, then, in a wilder paroxysm of grief, rushed to the window. As she flung it open with nervous haste, she saw the garden-gate opened by a vagrant, who came slowly up the path. Something in the woman's walk seemed to touch a chord in Zitella's memory. She looked again, and a low cry of terror broke from her lips, for the woman had suddenly lifted her head, and in the dark, bronzed visage Zitella imagined she recognised Zanoni, her gipsy foster-mother.

"If it is her—if it should be!" gasped the girl, shrinking back in wild terror, but not before the vagrant had caught a glimpse of her. "And if so, what hope is there for me? What can have brought her here but to wreak vengeance on me. Oh, Heaven! perhaps Hermann—"

It was added terror which checked the flow of Zitella's thoughts, for Zanoni had approached the window, and was holding out her shrivelled hand imploring a coin. Then their glances met, and Zitella began to breathe freely, and almost to smile at her folly as she saw she had been mistaken. No gleam of recognition was in the woman's wild, dark eyes. It was not Zanoni! She was about to order the gipsy away sharply, when a sudden thought flashed through her mind, and wild and improbable as it was, she determined to act upon it.

Beckoning the woman forward Zitella placed some coins in her outstretched hand, and checked the voluble flow of thanksgiving by saying in tongue which she had not used for three years,—

"You are a gipsy; you come from Spain; do not be afraid to confide in me. I also am Spanish, and I love your people."

"Roumania was my birthplace," replied the woman sadly, but we know no dwelling-place, and Spain has been as much my home as any other land. My son and I have been in England for the past year; how we came, or why, does not matter, but we have been here too long. I yearn to get back to my own land, that I may die there; but it is a wild, vain dream. Where should I find the money! You are the first who has shown me any money."

"I feel with you," replied Zitella in her gentlest tones. "We have kindred passions, but you must not despair of your desire. More wonderful things have happened. How much would you require to take you and your son back to your birth-land?"

The vagrant named a sum, and Zitella replied eagerly,—

"You shall have this sum, twice as much, if you will name some spot near this in which we may meet to-night and talk without fear of disturbance. I also have a heart's desire, in which you may help me without injury to yourself. I know," she added quickly, "that you have the art of divination, and I want you to reveal my future to me."

"I will not fail you, sweet lady," replied the gipsy; and then with muttered words that sounded like a blessing on her benefactor the gipsy turned away and passed down the garden path.

At that moment Valentine re-entered the room, and with a sweet, sad smile the girl beckoned him to her side. She drew his attention to the retreating form of the vagrant, and raised her dark eyes, suffused with tears, to his face.

"A link of my old life," she murmured. "That poor creature is a gipsy, my foster-mother. She came just now to the window asking alms; and though I knew her she did not appear to know me; but she looked at me with such a strange, guilty, fearful look. Perhaps I shall see her again."

Valentine heard little of what his companion was saying. He was absorbed in his

own thoughts, thoughts of his love and the beauty of the face into which he was gazing; but when Zitella paused he took her hand.

"My child, you sent me away in anger just now. You misunderstood me; and because I cannot bear to be estranged from you I have come back to say—"

"Ah! say nothing now," interrupted Zitella, feverishly.

She had withdrawn her hand from Valentine's, and veiled with it her excited face.

"Say nothing," she repeated, with a sob. "I was all to blame. I would have tempted you to deceive your friends for my sake. I wonder, now, that I had so little pride. But you need fear no more; I will be Zitella the gipsy once more."

"You will be, Zitella, my love, as you have ever been—my world!"

And as he spoke Valentine endeavoured to encircle the slender form with a lover's tender arm, but resolutely Zitella drew herself away.

"Oh, no," she answered, with a convulsive sob. "You forget all that lies between you and me. Remember I am but a gipsy."

"I remember it," cried Valentine, passionately, with pride and joy, "Zitella, my queen, my darling!"

"Oh, hush!" was the pleading interposition. "Say no more, at least, not now; wait until to-morrow. I feel as if I stood on the brink of a revelation. I feel as if to-morrow would make a great change in my life."

"Who do you think, Blanche, has been to see me while you were out riding?"

"Mr. Valentine Eyre?"

"Oh, you little witch! But, of course, you have had the news from Peters or Jeanette, my maid."

"I assure you, Lady Fitzroy, that I have not seen either Peters or Jeanette; but Captain Lister, whom I met in the Row this afternoon, told me that Mr. Eyre had returned, and I thought it likely that he would remember his old friend."

Lady Fitzroy smiled at her young friend's explanation, and then said, in a musing tone,—

"Valentine Eyre did remember me, but I cannot say that the object of his visit was entirely disinterested. He came to ask me a favour."

"Then he must be greatly changed from the Valentine of five years ago," replied Blanche Hastings, in a decided tone.

"He is greatly changed. The cynic is merged into the lover."

"You astonish me, Lady Fitzroy!"

"It is true, my dear Blanche. Our marble Valentine has fallen in love, and in a most romantic way, with a waif of his adoption, whom he now desires me to receive into my household that she may be presented to society under the most favourable auspices."

"Who is this girl?" asked Blanche Hastings, with languid interest.

"You remember a child whom I brought from Spain three years ago?"

"I fancy I heard you speak of her at the time; the orphan of a Spanish nobleman?"

"So I thought; but that story was not true. Valentine found the child among some gipsies; and, attracted by her beauty, conceived the idea of sending her to England to be educated. Now, at the most critical time of the girl's life, her real name and birth is revealed. It seems," continued Lady Fitzroy, "that Zitella is the only child of an Austrian noble, Count Sofreska by name, and the last of her distinguished race."

"The count, being suspected of some conspiracy against the government, his property was seized, and his life threatened,

when, to avoid capture, he fled into exile, leaving his child, with money and jewels, in the care of a nurse whom he deemed faithful."

"The nurse loved her charge, but she had a gipsy lover, for whose sake she converted the count's jewels into money, and fled to Spain with the child, which she refused to abandon. So Zitella grew up among the gipsies until she was found and rescued by Valentine Eyre."

"A most romantic story if only it were true," remarked Blanche Hastings; "but who is to prove its truth?"

"It has been already proved beyond a doubt," replied Lady Fitzroy, "for this gipsy Zanoni, is now in London, with proofs of Zitella's parentage; the other day she saw and recognised her foster child, whom she afterwards identified in the presence of Valentine Eyre."

"This young girl is very beautiful?" asked Blanche, in a tone whose forced indifference could not mask the burning jealousy which prompted the question.

"If she has fulfilled the promise of her childhood she will be the most dazzling star that has ever risen on a London season. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when it is announced that she is engaged to her guardian. I am only sorry," continued Lady Fitzroy, "that I did not see more of Miss Sofreska during the past three years, but society has so many demands."

"And for the future this new beauty will have so many that I shall be nowhere in your esteem."

Lady Fitzroy looked up at her friend with a smile and a few words of remonstrance.

"My dear Blanche, if I did not know you a lovely woman and one conscious of your own loveliness, I should say that you were envious of Miss Sofreska."

"Two stars move not in one sphere," quoted Blanche, with a sneer; "but I suppose I have had my season, and must submit to be eclipsed," she added, lightly, as she gathered up her riding hat and gloves and swept from the room.

"How odd Blanche is sometimes," mused Lady Fitzroy, when she was left alone. "She is so beautiful that whatever new star arises she may always command her own court, and certainly envy or jealousy is a new phase of her character. I always thought her too cold for such an emotion."

While Blanche Hastings, as she passed up the tapestry hung stairs to her own apartments, murmured through set teeth,—

"To think that five years a meaningless look, a light word, should have kindled a fire which to-day burns clearer than ever. Oh, Heaven! to think that I should have sighed in vain for a love which has been freely lavished on another—Zitella."

She broke off suddenly, catching her breath in a sob, as she reached her corridor, and encountered the astonished face of her maid, who had never seen her beautiful young mistress so agitated before.

(To be continued next week.)

MARRIAGE

Thou art my own, my darling and my wife;
And when we pass into another life,
Still thou art mine. All this which now we see
Is but the childhood of Eternity;
And thou and I, through trials and through tears,

The joys and sorrows of our earthly years,
Are growing up into a single soul,
God's workmanship; a clear completed whole

Made out of twain. Our love is but begun:
Forever and forever, we are one.

A. B.

TWICE CHOSEN.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A VILE PLOT.

THE following morning the Duchess was up unusually early for her, and she went to Lady Lyneston's bedroom to say goodbye.

Before starting, she had laughingly begged Lord Carruthers to take care of the young widow, and not to let the Marchese scare her with his admiration.

A peculiar smile crossed his Lordship's face.

"If needs be I think I can silence him," he answered, somewhat vaguely.

"Indeed! How?"

"At present with a name only. Later I hope to do so with something more substantial and satisfactory."

"You know something against him then?"

"I do."

"Then, Lord Carruthers, he should not be a guest in our house. You must confide your secret to the Duke."

"I fully intend to do so, but not before I can prove what I state. When shall you be back, Duchess? I shall not leave the house till you return."

"About three, or, stay, I will come back to luncheon at two if I find it possible. In the meantime, *au revoir*. I leave you 'on guard.' Don't let anyone run away with my little Countess," and with a friendly nod she walked towards the door.

"Are you off now? Then let me see you to your carriage," and he followed her out into the Hall.

Lord Carruthers was pale, and there were unusual lines of thought upon his brow.

He had had a wakeful night, and what little sleep he had obtained was fitful and restless.

When he went out the night before to watch the woman he had seen loitering about at the door of the Duke's mansion, he had scarcely got outside the house when a hansom dashed up, and the Marchese sprang to the ground, and, having paid the fare, was raising his hand to the medieval bell-pull when a detaining one was laid upon his arm.

"Carlo! for the love of Heaven, stop!" pleaded a woman's voice, in a pretty, broken accent. "I will not lead the life of a dog, while you follow one of enjoyment and luxury. You will find that even a worm will turn if you torture it too far."

"What, another scene, Marie! What things you women are!" he cried, impatiently. "Am I not working for your good as well as my own?"

"My good!" she laughed bitterly; "you have always thought of that! My good, that you should make love to another woman!"

"Bah! jealous! If you play the part I have set you properly, you will never lack money or fine dresses again. You must swear to every word of my story, my little sister!"

"Your sister!" she retorted, scornfully. "Carlo, if I loved you as once I did, before you had killed my devotion, you would scarcely have dared to thus ask me to help you to marry another woman; but as it is—"

She broke off suddenly with a pathetic wall in her voice.

"As it is," he repeated, coldly.

"Our Lady help me, I hate you."

"All the better," he returned, with a cruel smile. "I shall pay you well for your services, and the account between us will be settled."

She covered her wan face with her hands, then suddenly let them drop with a gesture of despair, and looked at him.

"And once you loved me passionately, Carlo. Do you remember, many years ago, when disgrace fell upon you, who it was that shielded you? I was pure as a summer morning then, Heaven knows, but I gave up my reputation to save your life. You could not have been the man who robbed and murdered the young French nobleman; of course not, when you had passed the night with Marie Paraviso. She loved you with an insane worship of you, and your Heaven-born art. You knew it, and asked this sacrifice of her love, promising to repay it with a life of devotion. She swore to it in the court, with cheeks tingling with shame, and blushes which but confirmed her story. Some men would have died willingly rather than expose a guilty mistress. But there are few who would have bought freedom at the price of an innocent woman's honour. Her father was a Roman, and could not brook disgrace. He cast her off, and died of a broken heart! She has much to thank you for, Carlo Cavenci!"

"Hush!" he said, uneasily. "Go home, and I will call upon you to-morrow afternoon. By then I shall know when you will be wanted."

"Home!" she repeated. It is mockery, to give it such a name."

"Mockery, or no mockery, you had better go! I cannot waste any more time talking to you."

She laughed a low, vindictive laugh.

"You might find it no waste of time to be civil, Carlo; but as it is—Addio!"

He turned and took her hand.

"Don't speak like that, Marie. I mean to behave handsomely to you when I have the money to do so. You may trust me; good-night. Move away, Cara, before I ring."

She obeyed him, and paused behind the very portico under the shadow of which Lord Carruthers was standing hidden.

"Trust him!" she moaned. "It would be as well to trust the restless and uncertain sea. Why should I stain my soul with a new lie for his sake? He can but murder me if I refuse. And if he did? What has my life been that I should preserve it? Oh; if I had but one friend to whom I could turn; only one to advise me, and help me to a better life, where his tyranny could not reach me!"

Lord Carruthers moved, and she started like a timid deer, and was turning away, when he spoke to her in a kind voice.

"Do you want a friend?" he asked.

"Who would be one to me in a strange land?" she answered, wearily.

"Perhaps I can help you, who knows?"

"You!"

"Yes! I have heard all that passed between you and that man; and I was in Italy when it all happened. So I know what you said was true."

"You are too young; you cannot remember it."

"I was but a lad, but I was in Court when you gave that evidence which saved Carlo Cavenci's life."

A great trembling seized upon her, and she clung to the postern for support.

"Poor girl!" he said, gently. "I wish I could ask you in to rest; but this is not my house, and I cannot. Come, take my arm, and let me walk part of the way home with you. What is your relationship, really, to Cavenci?"

"I am his wife!"

"Can you prove that? Have you the certificate of your marriage?" he asked eagerly.

"No, but I can give you the names of the

priest who united us, and of the church where we were wedded, if you like."

He stopped under the light of a street lamp, and entered both upon a tablet, which he took from his pocket for that purpose.

"And now," he said, kindly, "in gratitude for the information you have given me, let me help you. Would you like to have a quiet home with a good woman, where that black-hearted villain can never molest you?"

She turned up to him, a white wondering face, and he continued,—

"When I was a boy I had a governess who was very fond of me, and my father pensioned her for her lifetime. She lives in a tiny cottage within my park gates. She would receive you if I asked her."

"And you would ask her?" she demanded in astonishment.

"Yes, Yours was a noble sacrifice, and it has been ill rewarded. You spoke of Cavenci requiring another lie of you. Will you tell me what it is?"

"I will!" she answered, after a pause. "Do you know what he is trying to do now?"

"I believe I do. He is endeavouring to get a young and rich widow into his power."

"That is it; and he wants me to help him."

"How?"

"I am to state that I am his sister, and that Lord Lyneston married me privately in Italy but not being happy with him I ran away, and let others tell him of my death; but that, being still alive, the Countess had never had any claim to the title of wife, nor right to the property left to her for herself or her son."

"But the certificates! he could not produce them!"

"Could he not? Carlo can accomplish anything upon which he has set his mind, and all priests are not above being bribed!"

"What a vile plot!" he cried, passionately. "Signora, you will not lend yourself to it?"

"If I cross him, do you know what will happen?"

"No."

Marie Cavenci will be seen and heard of no more."

"You will be perfectly safe with my friend."

"Should I?" she asked eagerly. "And is this lady he is pursuing a friend of yours?"

"A very great friend."

"Then I will never say it, for your sake, for you have spoken kindly to me. He can but kill me!"

"Poor girl! It is too late to find you a place of refuge to-night, but early to-morrow I will provide you a safe asylum, and in a few days you shall go to a permanent home. Give me your present address, and pack up whatever you desire to bring away with you, but let it be only what you can carry, and tell no one at your lodging that you are going away, for doubtless they are all the creatures of Cavenci. Go out at eight o'clock to-morrow morning, and at the end of the street you will see a four-wheeler cab. Follow it, and you will find me in it. Do not keep me waiting, as I must be back here at nine o'clock. Cavenci must not miss me from the breakfast-table. When he seeks you in the afternoon he will find his bird flown! Do you understand my plan?"

"Yes, and I am more than grateful to you, Signore. No one knows what I have suffered; it is time it ended."

"Quite time; and no other woman shall fall a victim to him if I can help it. And

now farewell, I must return to the house, as I am keeping the servants up. At eight to-morrow, remember."

"At eight, and Heaven and Our Lady bless you."

The butler was waiting for Lord Carruthers, and admitted him at once, and was well rewarded for his vigil.

"Is Horvey up?" inquired his lordship, referring to his own valet.

"Yes, my lord; he is waiting for you."

"Then send him to my room at once," and Lord Carruthers went upstairs with rapid strides. He was elated at having so easily discovered all he desired to know.

"He said he would tell her to-morrow," he soliloquized; "he must have ascertained that the Duchess is going out; but, never mind, I will be upon the spot."

His man entered, and he desired him to call him at seven o'clock punctually, and to have a four-wheeler cab at the door by a quarter-past, but to make no comments upon his movements to the servants in the house; then he dismissed him to bed, and was glad to be alone.

"Poor Adela!" he said, after a pause of thoughtful reflection. "Poor girl! I would to Heaven I could help her in her trouble. If only she had not told me of her love for that other, I would yet again have offered her the shelter of my care. If she has got over it, her heart might even now turn to me." Then arose in his mind the question whether he really loved her still?

The hope and passion had died out of his heart little by little. Was what remained really love?

He was unable to answer the query which he raised. He had believed himself to be not only true, but steadfast in his attachment to Adela; and now, between the memory of her face and his, floated another image—that of Rosamond, the young widow Countess of Lyneston.

"No, no! I shall ever love Adela!" he answered, impatiently. "I will see her again, and she will be as dear to me as ever; and yes, I will ask her once more to be my wife;" and, having so determined, he seemed better satisfied with himself.

But it was of Rosamond he dreamed in his fitful, uncertain sleep.

Punctually at seven he was called, and after making a hurried toilet, hastened downstairs as noiselessly as possible. The cab was at the door, he jumped in. On his way he stopped at a respectable looking house, though certainly not in a fashionable neighbourhood, and, getting out, knocked at the door, which was quickly opened by a neat-looking elderly woman.

"Lor's a mercy, my lord, only to think of seeing you so early!" she cried, in unfeigned astonishment.

"Yes, I am early, Mrs. Rawlins; I want your help."

"And that you shall have, my Lord; there's nothing as you can ask, to which I'd say no, having served the late dear lord for thirty years, and owing the roof over my head to his generosity."

"I felt sure you would assist me," he said, with a kindly smile. "Have you two nice rooms vacant?"

"And that I have—the first floor."

"Then I'll engage them at once, and I want the tenant to come in within an hour."

"Dearie me! Well, everything is clean and tidy, so I've no call to raise objections."

"The lady who I shall bring here is very little known to me, but she is in great trouble, and I want you to be kind to her."

"Lor, sir! your're always helping someone; and that I will, with pleasure!"

"And don't talk about her to your

friends and neighbours, if she seems at all strange."

"She ain't—," and Mrs. Rawlins touched her head suggestively.

"Not a bit, only in deep sorrow; and now I'm off. I will drive her here myself," and his lordship went briskly down the steps.

"He's a Carruthers," murmured the old woman, contentedly. "I need have no fear, they're good, every one of them, and if she was not all right, he would not bring her here; but I wouldn't have received a tenant at such short notice from anyone else," and Mrs. Rawlins, having dusted the rooms, laid the breakfast things and put the kettle on to boil, and tidied herself to receive the new arrival.

Signora Cavenei was waiting in the street when the cab drew up at the end of it, and hurried to the vehicle.

"No one is down yet," she whispered, as though fearful of being heard. "I have only brought this," placing a small leather bag upon the seat opposite. "He bought what few things I have, so I thought I had better leave them."

"Quite right. Miss Wheeler will see that you have all you need."

"Is that the name of your old governess?"

"Yes; and now I am going to take you for the present to our old cook, Mrs. Rawlins; Mrs. by courtesy," he laughed.

"May I know the name of my friend?" she asked, looking up at him.

"Carruthers," he returned, "and, Signora, I will be a friend to you."

She clasped his hand gratefully, and after a moment's hesitation pressed her lips to it. And he left her in Mrs. Rawlins' charge; and desiring that everything should be provided for her comfort, he promised to see her again ere long, and drove away as fast as the horse could carry him, arriving at the Duke's mansion in Park lane before nine.

He rushed upstairs to his room, and hastily refreshing himself with the cold bath he found prepared for him, arrayed himself in the clean linen, and clothes which his valet had placed ready to his hand, and was downstairs in the breakfast-room within a few minutes of the gong sounding.

The Marchese was already in the room, and Lord Carruthers received his matutinal greeting with a cold bow, which was noted both by host and hostess.

Later, he had had the short conversation before mentioned with her Grace, when she came down ready for her start.

Then he wrote a note to Lady Lyneston, sealed it, gave it to the butler, and desired him to let her maid deliver it at once to her ladyship.

She received it with wonder, at first fearing it was from the Marchese, but her face relaxed into a smile as she turned to the signature. It was marked *private*, and ran thus,—

"DEAR LADY LYNESTONE,—

"The Marchese is in my power; do not fear him. It is better that he should expose his own villainy. Come down into the drawing-room as though you suspect nothing; he will soon join you. Remember, I shall be behind the screen and shall hear all he says, and be ready to protect you. Give him rope, and let him hang himself, and his persecution will be a thing of the past.—Yours sincerely,

"CARRUTHERS."

She read it a second time attentively, and smiled, then, dressing herself in her prettiest costume, descended to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XXV.

"ON GUARD."

LADY LYNESTONE encoined herself in a low easy chair, and drew from a pretty work-basket some dainty embroidery, and began to stitch leisurely, without once turning her face to the magnificent oriental screen at the further corner of the spacious apartment; but, nevertheless, her thoughts, if not her eyes, were centred upon the person it was hiding from her view.

How good he was to her! and if only he could really rid her of the presence of the absolutely hated Marchese, how glad she would be!

Not for the world would she thus risk meeting him, but for Lord Carruthers' written words. As it was, she was more than willing to trust herself to his guidance, and follow his advice. She had not long to wait.

The Italian came through the conservatory, singing an operatic air, in his rarely beautiful voice. Greatly as she disliked him, she paused to listen, her senses stirred by his wonderful power. He stood in the doorway, and saw the softened look upon her face, and smiled.

"My music pleases you, Contessa," he said, in a low voice; and walking to the piano he poured out what appeared to be his soul, in a passionate love-song; then suddenly he was at her side.

"Contessa!" he said, softly; "I sing for you; all I have sung is for you; no words, no melody, are too sweet to tell you how I love you! You need no telling; every woman knows she is beloved; but it is my pride and my pleasure to pour out my heart before you as water. Contessa, give me the joy of knowing that love has begotten love!" and he bent over, and looked into her eyes.

An indignant flush mounted to her cheek. "Marchese," she said, gravely; "I have given you no encouragement to address me thus; and more, I decline to listen to such words from you. You could never gain my affection, it is useless for you to try."

"Nay, sweet one, do not give a hasty judgment; you may see that it is better to have a friend and husband and protector, than to meet trouble alone."

"Trouble of course comes to all, but my good lord has shielded me from most cares by his kind thoughtfulness for me."

"Your good lord!" he echoed ironically. "Did you really believe in him, Contessa?"

"Did I believe in him?" she repeated, looking him fully in the face; "most truly and firmly!"

"Poverina," he said, softly.

"I do not require your pity, Marchese di Riviera," she answered, proudly.

"Poor child! You do not know."

"Know what? If you have anything to say, say it."

"As you will," he replied, with a shrug of his shoulders, and drawing a chair to her side, he seated himself, and looked earnestly in her face.

"Did you believe Lord Lyneston to be a bachelor when you married him, Contessa?"

"A bachelor! Of course he was; a confirmed old bachelor. No one ever expected him to take a wife to dear old Lyneston," she said, with a smile.

"Yet he might have taken one there, had he chosen, some years before he took you to share his home, poor girl," he answered, compassionately.

"What do you mean?"

"Contessa, how can I bear to pain you, I who love you," he answered, with a foreign gesture.

"Pray do not spare my feelings."

"If I might—if I dared."

"I beg you will proceed."

"You do not know what you are asking, Contessa; Lord Lynestone had married before."

"Do you mean to tell me that my husband was a widower?"

"Alas! no! His wife, or rather widow, still lives."

"Of course she does; I am not afraid of my own shadow, Marchese," she laughed.

"Poor child! you laugh! Yet you never were his wife; my own sister was Lady Lynestone, and she is yet alive."

"Your sister! Oh! there must be some great mistake."

"Not so; he married her in Rome, and she is now in town to claim her name and property, if I will let her. You and your boy are nameless and penniless, poorina! Now do you think I love you, Rosamond, or no?"

"If this were all true I should acknowledge the fact of your affection, however ill-placed it might be," she answered gravely.

"My darling!" he continued, taking her unwilling hand; "my sister shall never breathe this sad secret, never throw a shadow over your fair name, nor ruin the future of your bright-eyed boy. Give me the right to protect you, and I will do so with my life."

"My hand is then the price of your silence?"

"It is."

"Marchese," she said, rising and drawing herself up proudly. "If the title and property are your sister's, nothing would induce me to do her the great wrong of retaining them. Neither my fair fame, nor my boy's future, could tempt me to commit so gross an act of injustice. Let your sister prove her right, and I will give up my claims without a murmur."

"Brave woman!" whispered Lord Carruthers in his hiding-place.

"And you care nothing what the world will say of you!"

"Nothing!"

"Rosamond, you shall not thus sacrifice yourself. I will protect you in spite of your wishes," and he flung his arm about her.

"Don't touch me, sir," she cried, indignantly. "Am I to be insulted in her grace's drawing-room?"

"No," answered a voice.

The Marchese di Riviera, or Carlo Cavenci, started, and in another moment he and Lord Carruthers stood face to face.

"Coward and liar!" cried his lordship, with flashing eyes.

"Such words to a Roman nobleman!" blustered the Italian. "Your lordship shall answer for each one."

"I will, with a horsewhip!" returned the other coldly. "If you are not out of this house, bag and baggage, in a quarter of an hour."

"Are you its master?"

"I am yours, Carlo Cavenci. I was in court when you were tried for robbery and murder, and when you bought your wretched life at the expense of a woman's honour. Maria Paravino's was a noble sacrifice, and you have generously repaid it. Go, and never let me see your face again, or you may regret the day you crossed my path. The whole vile tale you have woven to bend the Countess to your will, is a tissue of lies. You have no sister, but you have a wife, whom you have left to pine in a low lodging-house, among coarse and brutal people, unfit to come near a refined woman. If you take my advice you will leave England before worse comes of it."

He crossed the room and rang the bell.

"Call a cab for this person," he said, indicating the Italian to the butler, "and

let him have what assistance you can to get him away as soon as possible."

The well-trained servant let no surprise appear in his face. He bowed, and held the door open for Carlo Cavenci to pass out.

The man stood like a stag at bay. He knew that the game was up.

For one moment he let his eyes rest with a bitter hatred upon that other who had defeated all his plans.

"We may meet again," he muttered through his clenched teeth, and turned from the room without another word.

"He will trouble you no more, Lady Lynestone," said Lord Carruthers, kindly; "but I fear, as it is, he has scared you, notwithstanding my warning," and he took her hand, and led her to a seat.

"Oh! Lord Carruthers! what a dreadful creature! I am afraid of him, and that's a fact. What did he mean by saying such awful things?"

"His words meant that he is both a ruffian and an imposter. He wished to frighten you into marrying him, by this bogey of his own wicked invention, for there is not a word of truth in anything that he has said. The story of Lord Lynestone's former union is as false as his pretended love for you. Bah! the word is not fit to come from his lying lips. I am thankful I came here, and that I have been able to unmask him, for had I not done so he might have given you real trouble. If he had told you this cruel tale, and you had believed him, and consented to keep it a secret, goodness knows where the evil would have stopped. He would have had you in his power."

The Countess shivered.

"I hope I should have had the strength of mind to tell him to do his worst; but who can tell?" she added, in a low voice.

Then she lifted her eyes to his, and stretched out her hand to him.

"You have been a real friend to me, Lord Carruthers! I shall ever be grateful for your kindness, and I hope we shall know more of each other."

"I sincerely reciprocate your sentiment," he answered, as he pressed her hand affectionately; "and if ever I'm in the vicinity of Lynestone I shall claim the privilege of a friend, and call upon you."

"Will you come to Lynestone and stay?" she inquired, warmly. "The Duchess has promised to pay me a visit shortly, and if you will accompany her I shall be more than glad."

"Do you mean it?" he asked, after a thoughtful pause.

"Yes; indeed, a hearty welcome will await you, if you do not object to the dullness of the dear old place. But I can offer you good shooting, and fishing, and hunting too, if you are fond of the sport."

"Then I will come," he said, decidedly. "If her grace will accept me as an escort. But mind," he added, with a smile, "it is neither the shooting, fishing, nor hunting which has tempted me, but the desire to improve a friendship pleasantly begun."

"Really?"

"And truly!" Then silence fell between them and she took up her fancy work, that woman's refuge upon all awkward occasions. She was the first to speak.

"How surprised our host and hostess will be to find their guest gone?" she said, with a smile.

"And glad, too, I am sure."

"I am certain of that; they never liked him."

"And yet they invited him to their house! Oh! society, society!"

"Yes; society is very hollow; people never pause to judge for themselves what men or women are. They are received everywhere," is answer enough, however bad they may be."

"In fact it is a case of one fool makes many."

"That is just it; I have enjoyed my peep at the bright world, but I should not care to live in it; there is too much glare and glitter, and too little sincerity and reality. I am happier in quiet, grand old Lynestone. The trees suit me better than the lamp-posts; the curtsies of my poor tenants than the bows of the 'upper ten'; and the deer in the park than the brilliant carriages in the 'Row.' You see I was not born to it, Lord Carruthers, and it is all new to a girl in the middle class of life. My father was an officer, it is true, but he was a poor man; and, moreover, he and my mother were not happy together, and they parted; so I really never saw him. They were both too proud ever to seek a reunion. Of course each thought the other to blame. It always is so in domestic troubles, I suppose."

"And always will be; but it was sad for you."

"Yes. We had rather a bad time of it. My mother's family were rich, but they lost all their money, and during my girlhood we were very poor; in fact, my dear mother really worked herself to death. My father was Lord Lynestone's private secretary for many years, and when he died he begged his lordship to seek us out, and befriend us. You know now how he came to marry me," she ended, with a smile, and a bright upward glance.

"I am certain of one thing," he answered earnestly.

"And that is?"

"That he never regretted it," and once again silence reigned.

"I hope I am not in your way," he said at length, "but I promised the Duchess to remain 'on guard' until her return."

"On the other hand, I fear I am wasting your valuable time," she returned, "but I appreciate being looked after, I can assure you."

"Then I will remain without hesitation, the more pleased to have your companionship, knowing that duty calls me away this afternoon."

"So soon?" she asked, with an evident look of disappointment.

"Yes! we must not always consider our own pleasure, you know, and we shall meet again at Lynestone."

"I am very glad," she said; then suddenly looking up, she asked if he minded children.

"No, I am very fond of them," he answered truthfully.

"Perhaps you won't object to my boy's company too," she laughed; "for I promised to have him down to sit with me, and I never like to break my word to him."

"Quite right," said his lordship, rising. "May I ring the bell for you to order him to be brought downstairs?"

"Will you? Thank you very much."

So when the Duchess returned at a quarter to two, she looked in upon a very pretty picture.

The little fellow was seated comfortably upon Lord Carruthers' knee, holding his hand confidingly, and his blue eyes upturned to his kindly face, listening to some wonderful fairy tale which he was inventing or repeating for his amusement, while the young Countess paused in her work to listen too, scarcely less interested than the child.

"A pretty picture of home life," cried the Duchess. Fact had spoilt Fiction.

The thread of the story was broken; they all three had to return from fairy land to every day life.

Lady Lynestone sighed.

"Is that all?" asked the boy.

"Not quite, I must kiss you," said his lordship, stooping over him.

"Yes! for his pretty mother," thought the woman of the world, with a smile deepening about her lips.

"Well, Lord Carruthers, you have been faithful to your trust?" she laughed.

"He has indeed," said the Countess, earnestly, putting away her work. "Oh! my dear friend, I can't think what I should have done without him; he has been so good to me!"

"I am glad you have earned such a character," said her Grace, turning to Carruthers.

"You can't think how that wretched Marchese insulted me, and tried to frighten me into marrying him, and goodness knows what might have happened, but for Lord Carruthers!"

"Most gallant champion of dames, relate your deeds," said her Grace, tragically.

"There is very little to relate," returned his lordship, with a smile. "I accidentally found out that the man was laying a plot to entrap Lady Lynestone, and determined to unmask him—that is all!"

"And well he succeeded!" struck in Lady Lynestone, warmly. "My dear, he is not a marquis at all; his name is Carlo Cavenaci, nothing more."

"He was a singer in Naples when I was a lad, and when I visited the city with my tutor he was under a very black cloud. He was tried for robbing and murdering a French nobleman, to whose rooms he went to play cards."

"And he was acquitted?"

"He falsely proved an alibi," returned his lordship, gravely.

"And this creature has been an intimate guest in our house?" cried her Grace, indignantly. "The Duke really must be more careful in inquiring about people's antecedents. It does not do to take even a proud Roman marquis upon trust, you see. Lord Carruthers, I am more than indebted to you for your care of the Countess. What has become of that monster?"

"He has gone," returned his lordship, quietly.

"But he may return," she answered, with a look of alarm.

"Not he. I will make St. Ives an *courant* with all the facts of the case after luncheon. One word will be enough to send him off, if ever he should again venture into your society, but my opinion is that he will leave England before the day is out."

"Poor Rosamond! Fancy such a wretch trying to gain your love!" said her Grace indignantly. "It is atrocious!"

"More especially as his wife is now in London," continued his lordship, drily.

"Worse and worse," cried the Duchess, putting up her hands as though to ward off his words; that surely is the agony point of your story. Don't tell me any more harrowing details. I don't think I could stand any more!"

"Well, I will spare you, but Lady Lynestone will have a good deal more to add in a quiet *tête-à-tête*. You had better hear it all; the story is not half completed yet." After luncheon you may feel stronger and better able to stand up against it," he laughed, quizzically. "And, after all, it will come mild from the Countess's lips. Remember she had to hear it all from that Italian volcano; and give her all your best sympathy."

"And that I will," said her Grace, kindly. "There's the gong, and my bonnet is still on."

The two ladies retired to the Duchess's boudoir after luncheon, while the gentlemen repaired to the smoking-room, and both the Countess and Lord Carruthers told their strange stories from beginning to end.

"A scoundrel of the blackest dye," cried the Duke, indignantly. "I hope he will never cross my path again. I am greatly obliged to you for your action in the matter in clearing him out of my house as you have done. To think of my wife and Lady Lynestone being in the company of such a ruffian makes my blood boil."

"My dear, what an escape!" cried the Duchess, looking white and troubled. "I introduced you to the man, and I should never have forgiven myself if harm had come to you. Lord Carruthers behaved splendidly. Fancy his remaining in the room all the time; but your knowing he was there, must have made you feel safe and secure."

"I did, indeed. I should have fainted if I had been alone."

"Poor girl. Well! it is all over now."

"Yes, that is indeed something to be thankful for; and Duchess, when are you coming to Lynestone, for I must really go home now? I have enjoyed my visit to you very much; but I have so many things to see to, which greatly need my attention."

"Very well, Rosamond, I believe in speeding the parting guests, as much as in welcoming the coming one."

"And Lord Carruthers is coming too," continued the Countess, with a rosy blush; "if you will bring him down."

The Duchess threw her arms around her friend's neck, and kissed her.

"Oh! is he?" she laughed. "Well, Rosy, you couldn't do better."

The blushes grew deeper and deeper.

"Oh! indeed no! there is nothing of that sort," she protested. "He has been very, very kind to me, that is all."

"Oh! that is all, small woman, is it?" said her Grace, laughing still. "Well, we shall see."

"Dear Duchess, indeed we are only friends!" asserted the Countess, earnestly.

"Well, friends are very nice things, Rosy, when they are made of the right stuff? I wish you joy of your friendship. I will certainly bring Lord Carruthers down to Lynestone."

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 1960. Back Nos. can be obtained through any newsagent.)

FACETIÆ

MRS. BILKINS: "What a commanding presence that lady has." Mr. Bilkins: "Yes, I guess she's married."

LADY: "I don't like this picture so well as I did the last one you took of me." Photographer: "Ah, madam, I have not the artistic taste that I had when I was young; and, besides, my camera is getting old."

"THEY say," remarked the mother, thoughtfully, referring to the young man who had called the previous evening, "that he is of a grasping disposition." "Well, I should say he was!" exclaimed the small boy. "Willie!" cautioned his sister, but it was too late. "You just ought to have seen the way he grasped Lou when she said she'd marry him," persisted the youngster.

QUARRYMAN (commissioned to break the news gently): "Did ye hear that foine blast, mum?" Woman: "Indade I did. It frightened me." "Would Oi had been near ye to protect ye, mum. It's just such a foine-lookin' woman as you Oi like to protect, mum. It's me yez ought to marry." "It's you ought to be kilt entirely fer talkin' that way an' me married to a foine mon like Micky Finnegan." "Och, ye naden't mind about him, mum. He was kilt by th' blast."

SOCIETY

THE wedding-ring of Queen Victoria was, by her own wish, buried with her. As a matter of fact, it had been her inseparable "wear" for more than sixty years. The rule of her married life had been never to remove it; and, once, when a cast of her hand was taken, her great alarm was that the ring might be displaced with the plaster. With the single exception of its enforced removal, in later years, for a few hours, to be enlarged, so as to accommodate it to the increased girth of the finger, the ring was worn incessantly for over sixty years.

Of all her innumerable rings, next to her wedding-ring Queen Victoria most valued a very simple one indeed. It was made of gold and enamel, and had a very small diamond as its central ornament. Its market value was slight enough, as well might be, for it was bought by a boy's pocket-money. It was, in fact, the first present made by Prince Albert to the Princess Victoria when, at the age of sixteen, he visited the future country of his adoption. The actual emerald serpent ring, which he gave her afterwards as the formal engagement ring, was never quite so precious to her Majesty as this humble predecessor, which stood as the first token of this memorable affair of the heart.

ONE of the suggestions with regard to the Victoria Memorial to be erected opposite Buckingham Palace is that it should take the form of an arch. There is no doubt a good deal to be said for this architectural style. It is fifty years since the Marble Arch, which had been erected at Buckingham Palace twenty-one years before, was removed to Cumberland Gate, Hyde Park, where it now is.

THE Empress Frederick is bearing the physical pain of her illness with extraordinary courage, and it is appropriate to recall what Lady Bloomfield, once Maid of Honour, tells in her memoirs. The year before the Princess Royal's marriage, when she was only seventeen, she burnt her arm. "The Princess behaved like a heroine, never uttered a cry, and only said, 'don't frighten mamma; send for papa first.'"

The arm was a terrible sight, the muslin sleeve burnt into it." A little later, when still very young, as Princess Frederick William, the Empress was in great danger on an "interesting" occasion that has had momentous consequences in Europe. "When the Princess was so ill she kept begging those present to pray for her, and she looked up to her husband, who held her in his arms the whole time, and asked him to forgive her for being so impatient."

MOST of the Duchess of Kent's possessions, in the way of china and furniture, which have hitherto been at Frogmore, are now being removed to Osborne Cottage, as they were bequeathed by Queen Victoria to Princess Henry of Battenberg. Some of the china is of great value, and in an excellent state of preservation.

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STATISTICS

THE value of American boots and shoes exported last year was £263,803, as against £264,267 for the preceding year. The shipments to the United Kingdom amounted to £228,057.

THE colonies of England, including India, cover an area of 9,000,000 square miles; and if the area of British protectorates and spheres of influence is added, the total area subject to British rule is 11,000,000 square miles. The smaller area, that of the colonies and India alone, supports a population of 367,000,000; the larger area about 420,000,000, or, roughly speaking, six times the population of the United States.

THE contribution of the insurance companies towards the cost of the London Fire Brigade is at the rate of £35 per million sterling of insurances effected in the metropolitan area, and in 1899 amounted to £23,494, or not quite one-sixth of the cost of maintaining the Brigade. A small army of from eleven to twelve hundred firemen are required to defend the lives and property of five million people from fire, there are 190 escapes, 62 engines, 235 horses, 14 river stations, 14 tugs and barges, 41 miles of hose, and over 25,000 hydrants in the streets.

GEMS

MODESTY and humility are the sobriety of the mind; temperance and chastity are the sobriety of the body.

MODERATION is the silken string running through the pearl chain of all virtues.

SILENCE is the understanding of fools, and one of the virtues of the wise.

THE talent of success is nothing more than doing what you can do well.

IN the human breast two master passions cannot co-exist.

WOMAN, AS VIEWED BY GREAT MEN.

HE is a fool who thinks, by force or skill, to turn the current of a woman's will.—Samuel Tuke.

A PERFECT woman, nobly planned, to warn, to comfort and command.—Wordsworth.

THE most beautiful object in the world, it will be allowed, is a beautiful woman.—Macaulay.

IF the heart of a man is depressed with cares, the mist is dispelled when a woman appears.—Gay.

OH, woman! lovely woman! * * * Angels are painted fair, to look like you.—Otway.

LOVELY woman, that caused our cares, can every care beguile.—Beresford.

KINDNESS in women, not their beauteous looks, shall win my love.—Shakespeare.

HE that would have fine guests, let him have a fine wife.—Ben Jonson.

A WOMAN's strength is most potent when robed in gentleness.—Lamartine.

ALL I am or can be I owe to my angel mother.—Abraham Lincoln.

DISGUISE our bondage as we will, 'tis woman, woman, rules us still.—Moore.

HEAVEN will be no heaven to me if I do not meet my wife there.—Andrew Jackson.

WOMEN need not look at those dear to them to know their moods.—Howells.

REMEMBER, woman is most perfect when most womanly.—Gladstone.

EARTH has nothing more tender than a pious woman's heart.—Luther.

OIL and water—woman and a secret—are hostile properties.—Bulwer Lytton.

RAPTURED men quits each dozing sage, O woman, for thy lovelier page.—Moore.

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